



LEGEND OF THE SUPREME SOLDIER

BOOK 06

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Legend of the Supreme Soldier

(师士传说)

by

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Synopsis

Ye Chong was a denizen of Trash Planet-12. On one fateful day, he discovered a treasure that would forever alter his destiny from a pile of junk – Mu Shang, an unknown machine with artificial intelligence and a lost memory. Together, they venture into the vast galaxy as the isolated “caveman” that was Ye Chong began absorbing all sorts of knowledge and meeting people from all walks of life. He gradually discovers more and more about his own mysterious past as well as his partner’s. Read to find out more!

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 501: Hope to Live I

And because of this, his concern towards this fleet and this mysterious Master Jay only got stronger over time. He had been trying all sorts of channels to obtain information regarding this fleet. Unfortunately, it was fruitless most of the time. This Master Jay apparently had a method of his own when it came to management. The fleet was made out of utter folks yet they had the discipline of an actual military troop. That was mission impossible to him. He felt that was the core issue of his capability. Xiao Wan might be the supreme leader of this fleet, but hardly she had interfered Arwa.

And this time around, Jay's fleet had performed such an overhaul that it was beyond his expectation. Since in his viewpoint, it was hard to unite an army of a variety. Any bit of ember on the haystack could strike a forest fire. The fleet could disband on its own upon crisis. So he had been treading the ground carefully, handling the fleet with care.

It wasn't him alone but everyone who had interests on this fleet would probably never expected that the instructor, Ye Chong did not really concern on the day the fleet disbanded.

The size of the fleet had decreased, contrary to everyone's expectation. It felt like the worst move to make at this period since not only it would weaken the entire force, but also it could kill the confidence in people.

That should have been his final conclusion, but the old captain of the fleet had given an explanation which changed his mind.

The old captain basically pointed out Jay's judgement in the situation, which Arwa actually noticed. Jay should have other channels to get the necessary intelligence. It was evident as he at least knew the severity of raids of red-tailed beasts around the galaxy. Getting good intelligence had been Arwa's biggest problem.

The Xiao Family's army was actually dead despite the mention of its existence to the public. Furthermore, they had not even established a working network of intelligence. So Arwa was literally blind to the outside world. He could not make a fair judgement.

Technically, yes, one would very likely be destroyed if one traveled into the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, be it Jay's fleet or Arwa's. Not even the trained army could survive the asteroid belt, let alone this fleet consisting ordinary citizens whose mentality and strength were probably far weaker.

That explained the shrinking size of Jay's fleet. Everyone just left the party before they marched into the mouth of the giant calamitous beast.

Even though Jay had led them through one victory against the red-tailed beasts and another, they were no longer facing red-tailed beasts but nature itself. The universal law of nature. A thing that humanity could never conquer.

Nonetheless, Arwa agreed to Jay's decision...well... assuming Jay was right on his intelligence.

Arwa himself was confident that he would make the same decision given that he got the same intelligence as Jay. He had sufficient experience fighting against the notorious brilliance of the cunning red-tailed beasts. He had witnessed the collapse of the front-line and had surely tasted that close-shave moment of his life. It was the most agonizing event in his memory.

The mysterious Master Jay rather took the most treacherous path of the galaxy, gambling with his and his fleet's lives, than gambling with the odds of the red-tailed beasts completing the very siege that would swallow the entire galaxy.

What would that imply?

Arwa's schemata ran rapidly.

That would imply that Jay was very confident of the intelligence he had obtained as well as his own judgement. That was why he took the greatest risk.

The conclusion was a little beyond Arwa's expectation. But there was already no time for him to act surprised. He should be figuring out their next move. Assuming Jay was right about his judgement, that would mean a capital punishment for Arwa and his fleet. Based on the old captain's illustration, Arwa could make out of location of Jay's fleet which was much closer to Kasent. Jay should be presuming that his fleet would not be able to go beyond Kasent before the red-tailed beasts finished their circle. Well, neither could Arwa's fleet.

The options had become clear then - either Arwa followed the planned course as before, disregarding Jay's change of course or he would follow Jay into the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

Arwa was getting indecisive on this, as he was fully aware of what his decision could bring to him as well as the entire fleet. Arwa was becoming more impressed of Jay, on how Jay could pick the treacherous path so calmly. It certainly required ounces of courage.

Currently Arwa was 70 or 80% convinced of Jay's judgement. He might as well followed Jay into the asteroid belt but that would inevitably lead to massive casualties which might disband his fleet immediately.

While Arwa was hesitating, Ye Chong no longer was troubled by any of these.

The people in Ye Chong's fleet had been working from day to night not noticing the hours passing by. A few of them started to run out of stamina that they fell. Their weights were dropping significantly yet their spirit burned high. On the other hand, the folk mechanics like Yang Ming had already a few of them collapsed. None of them were retreating however, some of them

even used stimulants to keep them working.

All of them knew how much each second would matter. It was a race with not only time but also fate as well as the Reaper. Under the lead of these mechanics, the entire fleet was enthralled carrying out the operation, including their indifferent leader, Ye Chong.

T-1 to Calamitous Asteroid Belt and they managed to finish the strengthening of every spaceship in line. Half of the technicians, included Yang Ming, fell down. Their blood and sweat had inspired the others, especially the young pilots who eagerly awaited the next phase of the operation once they entered the deadliest zone of the galaxy.

Ye Chong took a day off earlier. Being the sole leader was far more occupying than any other position, especially in a timing like this, without the help of the artificial intelligence. He was the most experienced person regarding the asteroid belt.

The asteroid belt was boundless like the sea with the clusters of irregularly shaped rocks hovering around. The gigantic fleet was looking like a dust particle when compared to it. Most passengers were mentally prepared for the adventure but they were still overwhelmed by the difference in size when they marveled at the belt itself.

That was when they received an order from Master Jay to proceed. The firm voice rang profoundly in the ears of everybody, which calmed them somehow. No worry, no bewilderment or hesitation could be found in their eyes.

The Calamitous Asteroid Belt is the greatest view in the galaxy.

Then we shall be greater as we conquer it!

Confidence rocked in the heart of every sailor, as their actions became more efficient.

"Shrink the formation. War units take care of both wings."

"All combat units into position."

"Mechanics standby in your positions now."

"Medical units on standby too."

...

A chain of orders came from Haskel and spread throughout the entire fleet. The captain's room on every spaceship was now the busiest, liveliest spot in the whole spaceship. All sorts of micro-commands, signals were passed around from people to people, through the public address system.

The fleet then reformed into a diagonal, as they gradually moved towards the asteroid belt. The members could already make out of the shapes of each asteroid hovering in waves.

It was another period of dead silence after the instruction had been passed and carried out. Everyone was staring at the hologramic screen.

They were close.

They got closer!

The entire fleet was traveling like a diagonal shuriken striking at the piece of patterned plate of rock.

Because of the fleet's colossal size, it was impossible to dodge every asteroid perfectly. They were forcing in, as they could see the handful of rocks being bounced away by the armor of their ships. It was like a domino when it happened. One rock being bounced away would hit into another piece of space rock, the momentum went on, like a droplet of water into a pot of boiling oil. The waves of asteroids started boiling...

There were asteroids crashing into the fleet like cannonballs, specifically the spaceships at the outermost layer.

"All onto steers! Hold it, do not tilt!"

"Stay calm! Stay on speed!"

"Mechanics perform inspection now!"

The voices of captain were chilling the atmosphere in the midst of silence.

There were no command from Haskel. Ye Chong did not influence the other ships, as he knew it was just the prelude before the storm. If they could not even settle this problem on their own, the later would be unimaginable.

Spaceships were not made for asteroid belt travels, especially the deadly ones. Its size would disrupt the pulling forces between each peacefully traveling asteroids, which could be dangerous. Mechs, however, were more suitable for asteroid belt travels. Their size as well as the mobility gave them better safety, well except if there was a whirlpool in the end, that would be a gamble.

Thump. Klink. Bump.

It was like a rain of asteroids as a few sizable rocks just hit the armor like meteor shower.

Fortunately, there had not been actual damage to any of the spaceships, although dents could be seen on the ships... It was a painful sight to the captains.

Chapter 502: Hope to Live II

The warships at both wings were not having a fun time being the first line of defense, as they were preoccupied with the task of destroying the larger space rocks coming towards them. The damage caused by the collision between these space rocks and the spaceship would be horrendous. It would be easily a critical hit on any spot of the other ships. So they had to crush them before the space rocks could touch them, as what Master Jay ordered.

They might be as busy as bees, but they were better off compared to the transporting spaceships. Their armors were far thicker, to begin with. Every single part of their warship was armored. As long as collision on the same spot did not occur consecutively, they were very much safe.

The fleet traveled steadily towards the depth of the asteroid belt.

It was the second day of penetrating the asteroid belt. Clearly the density of asteroids had increased 3 times more than the day before, which consequently stressed the people more. Haskel remained at the center of the entire formation so no space pebble could even touch it.

There had not been any form of casualties at the moment. The crew members had a boost in will, as they seemed to have seen a light of hope despite being in probably the darkest, the most treacherous corner of galaxy. Nonetheless, the leader, Ye Chong did not seem particularly happy with the situation.

"This isn't right," Shang said without cheekiness in his tone. "There is high activity in asteroid region." Worries were flooding his beeping, "It could destabilize at any moment, especially with our intrusion. There is a considerable amount of possibility that an asteroid whirlpool could occur." He was not entirely wrong. The Calamitous Asteroid Belt was known deadly for its great deal of unstable regions which were identified to be frequented by

whirlpool phenomenon. If Ye Chong was traveling alone, he would have chosen to leave the area right away.

"Mhm," replied Ye Chong. He was as worried as Shang but there was no workaround for him at the moment. The area of this region was exceptionally sizable. They had been traveling on the shortest course to perform a space jump. Yes, they could have made a detour but there would be no guarantee that they could avoid the entire region safely while only consuming more time. The shortest course was estimated to be a three-day travel, yet they would need to spend a few more days breaking the rocks if they took a turn. The longer they took in the asteroid belt, the more risk they would get.

"Shang, calculate the chance of us, at maximum as well as the current speed, being able to pass this region before a potential whirlpool phenomena occurred."

One was not meant to travel at maximum speed in Calamitous Asteroid Belt. With these asteroids, the spaceships would only be hindered. Not only the spaceships would be damaged greatly, the space would be further destabilized. The damage was not an issue compared to the chance of being sucked into a quantum singularity.

Ye Chong had no idea what the maximum destabilization the space could take before a whirlpool phenomena would occur. Thus, he asked Shang to perform simulation on both properties to get a basic reference on whether an asteroid whirlpool could form; if so, they also had to find out the timing when it occurred. They must not be the passive ones here. They must do something, however, the acceleration would highly increase the likelihood of the formation. So, which would be a better choice then?

5 minutes lapsed, "5%," muttered Shang." Assuming the fleet accelerated, the likelihood of a safe escape would be 5% higher." Then he added, "That is Mu's calculation, by the way." Even though Mu did not provide the entire sequence of calculation, Ye

Chong was fairly convinced.

"Alright, we have to leave this dangerous area as soon as possible," commanded Ye Chong firmly after a moment of ponder.

5% might not look like something in the eyes of most people, but that could be the very feather that tilted the scale of life for Ye Chong.

The fleet was speeding up upon his command.

The asteroid shower intensified!

The domino of asteroids were breaking up.

The zone was destabilizing rapidly!

The activity was getting stronger, as the fleet sped up.

Boom!

One spaceship at the end of the fleet was crushed by a giant spaceship with a diameter of 300 meters right in the body. The spaceship blew up.

That was the first casualty.

People could not help but to flinch at the scene. Simply no one would have survived that explosion. They could not do a thing to the situation. They were already occupied in saving themselves.

It was as if the wails of people rang in their ears. They were watching out for the rocks, but their lips were tight.

Ye Chong remained in the commander's room, his eyes soullessly gazed on the holographic screen. He saw everything through the projection. He must think for the entire fleet. He needed to be calm. He had to make decisions that would cause the least casualties. That would what a leader like him should do. He did not have time to mourn for the dead.

"Shrink further. Formation - 20 meters away from each other," said Ye Chong. The crew members quickly passed the order to

every spaceship. Ranged firearms like warships were scarce in the fleet. Most of their firepower came from the close-combat models. Although the models allowed them an easier time dealing with red-tailed beasts, such setup gave them a lethal weakness - vulnerable to ranged attacks. It was clear, that the space rocks would cause horrible damages if they were not destroyed at range. They might have strengthened the armor of each spaceship but it was only effective against the smaller asteroids. The large ones would be an overkill.

The density of the rocks was great, as if an actual sea of rocks. The fleet was as if an icebreaker, opening a way further into the frozen ocean.

The first explosion seemed to be a trigger.

A trigger for more casualties.

Just when Ye Chong's fleet was struggling in the asteroid belt, Arwa was leading his fleet into the asteroid belt.

Eventually, Arwa chose to follow the Master Jay.

He did receive a number of objections from his men but he had his authority of giving ultimate command like Ye Chong. His order was unchangeable. At least Xiao Wan was fully supportive on his proposition. He thought everyone would be against him at first, that was a relief.

And it was when the news of his decision reached the entire Gray Valley.

People were confused, of how the two greatest leaders had made the exact decision, one was the military genius, Master Jay who first wiped out the wave of red-tailed beasts successfully; the other being Arwa, the wise strategist who managed to break through the siege during the front-line collapse.

It was a signal for the people, that probably it was a right decision to head into the asteroid belt.

The moment when Arwa ordered for a full acceleration into Calamitous Asteroid Belt, Kasent suddenly had a massive migration.

Residents on Kasent were preparing to migrate, as countless spaceships could be seen zooming into space. With the hope to live, they headed for the world beyond their reach.

On 6 a.m. the third day, a large wave of red-tailed beasts was detected at the few watching points near Kasent.

And that was when people who was trying to travel beyond Kasent jerked their steps. The spaceships approaching Kasent were accelerating to the maximum right away, while the distant ones took a turn and ran towards the warping point within the Calamitous Asteroid Belt frantically.

Ye Chong was unaware of the happening outside, but he knew he was in hot water. It was as if they were treading on the landmine area. They might have 5% more likelihood if they travel fast, but once a whirlpool phenomena occurred, the likelihood would drop to 0% immediately. No argument would be needed. It was undeniable.

...(Meanwhile at the mechanics)...

A new mechanic took over Yang Ming's position. He had not fully recovered. He overclocked himself too much. It was true, he wanted to work more, so he dragged himself to the front-line, he had to chase the time, he had to repair all the damaged armor or the ship would be sinking if they got hit by another space rock.

It was a tiring a task to fix it. It was a tugging war. He could hear the panicked voice of the messenger passing updates on the damages. There seemed to be a new area dented.

Well, he eventually did not need to even hear the messenger speaking. Every quake occurred at the ship was sufficient to convince him that there was another collision occurred. He had a

handful of assistants around him. It felt like a stormy ride to him, especially when he was working on the repair. The pebbles were hitting the armor like bullets.

And now he got replaced.

Finally he could take a break...

He almost tripped on himself when he got off the platform.

Chapter 503: Hope to Live III

He wanted to close his eyes. He coveted that warm, fluffy bed in his room. But reality hit him, reminding him that there were far more important things to do. He tried to relax by sitting at the corner, with a mug of warm water in his hands and a dry bread in his mouth. He had to restore his stamina as soon as possible. With that in mind, the hollow eyes were reflecting the glow of the flares occurring sometimes out there.

"Man this place is just hell." He heard Stringy the repairman, the mechanic, ranting out loud opposite him. His curly hair reminded people of the rounded strings at the workplace, so they called him Stringy.

Yang Ming was smiling, showing agreement on what Stringy had said. He took a few sips. He would love to give a word or two but his throat was cracking from drought.

Suddenly, the ship shook violently, that the water escaped Yang Ming's grip and shattered on the ground.

Both Yang Ming and Stringy looked at each other, their eyes were illustrating the same thoughts - the ship was collided by something huge again, during which their eyes reflected another blooming flare in the dark void.

Yang Ming was a little bewildered upon seeing that one last sight illuminated by the explosion.

It was chaos. A mayhem. Rocks of different sizes were flying everywhere, hitting on anything that stood in their way, be it a spaceship, or another piece of rock. The fleet was having a hard time maintaining the ever-deforming formation.

Those days felt heavenly now when they only had to fight red-tailed beasts.

Before the flare faded, one could see that young face of Yang

Ming, at loss of joy belonged to someone of his age, complicated with horror, worries, nostalgia...

Was the exploded spaceship a prophecy of what they would become in the near future?

And somehow Yang Ming could hear the answer, uttered firmly and indifferently by Master Jay, flashing by in his mind.

"Area B-3 has been struck! Area B-3 has been struck! All technicians please proceed promptly! I repeat, all technicians please proceed promptly!" The alarm broke Yang Ming's schemata.

"Kek... my bottom hasn't even relaxed on the ground and they got new task for us," said Stringy with a smile, revealing the pair of yellowish buckteeth of his. He got up and headed B-3 fast.

...(Meanwhile)...

Ye Chong did not look pleased. It was the first time the crew members had seen such expression on their Master Jay. One could already imagine the crisis they were going to face.

"Ye, the destabilization! It's climbing!" alerted Shang.

Honestly, Ye Chong had already perceived the worsening situation even without Shang's reminder. He had already lost 25 spaceships at this point. Way before the fleet sank into the rocky sea of Calamitous Asteroid Belt, Ye Chong had already reallocated most members of the 200 ships at the outermost spaceships to the 300 spaceships at the protected center, which included Haskel that got fairly crowded at the moment. There remained about 20 crew members on every ship at the outermost layer of formation.

The formation consisted of 3 protection layers occupied by those 200 ships, the sole duty for them would be to protect whatever inside.

20 members on each ship at the layers, totaling up to 4000 members guarding the 3 levels of shell for the people.

And all 4000 of them volunteered themselves.

Ye Chong was having headache when he plotted this. He knew what the people on those ships would eventually become.

But Shang gave him a suggestion way back - instead of ordering a random few, let the members volunteer themselves.

He felt it could be an effective way... however as expected from Shang's intelligence.

It was effective, too effective.

Only on the third day after the announcement, he had already received 30,000 applicants for the positions. Under Shang's assistance, Ye Chong picked out 4000 out of those at last.

And they had already lost 25 spaceships, which meant at least 500 men had lost their lives.

The destabilization rate was increasing.

Nonetheless, mortality rate was not the only outcome of the explosion. The explosion had created waves which had negatively affected the stability of the asteroid belt. It was obvious that the destabilization shared a directly proportional relationship with the chance of a whirlpool phenomena formation.

It was a major loss. Not only they lost a portion of their forces on every explosion, but also they faced a higher risk of being destroyed by an asteroid whirlpool.

If they could not figure out a counter for this, they would lose everything in the end, even their lives.

Ye Chong ground his teeth, he thought of conserving forces at first, but he no longer had the option, he must do something. He had to let go off the last bit of forces, "Order : Combat Unit A, battle station."

The commander's room of Haskel got busy as every spaceship containing the pilots was heard. The saving grace was, none of the

spaceships with his trained pilots blew up.

10 spaceships containing the pilots readjusted their direction and had their gates opened.

"Charge!"

"Go! Go! Go!"

"Charrgggeeee!"

In 5 seconds, the order was carried out. The pilots hopped into the waves of asteroids in their mechs.

Within a minute, the entire Battle Unit A, consisted of 1200 D-6s had been fully discharged from the ship.

They traveled in small groups, with 3 units each. So 400 small groups swam across the ocean of rocks freely like fishes. Mechs were far more flexible than spaceships in an environment like this. Their mission this time would be to hold up the coming asteroids - slowing them down or destroying them directly - anything that could work but safety would be their first priority.

Ye Chong regained control of the situation the moment he sent the 1200 mechs into the asteroid belt. The units would become the net that helped filtering the asteroids, which lessen the protecting units' burden.

The pilots were not having an easy time however. They got to be focused. There were far too many of asteroids around them. They might be trained soldiers, but the environment were far too consuming for their mentality. One could never predict an asteroid. It was like an assassin that would give one's back a stab when unnoticed. There was no second life, it was no game, it was war.

Ye Chong was the first to realize the issue. For some reason, he had amazing intuition on battling, not even Mu/Shang could do it better.

"All units revolve about the spaceship. Maintain coordination."

No one had doubted a single word Ye Chong had said, as they executed the order right away. The wandering mechs had now gathered up and reformed themselves about the spaceships. They would only leave their orbit when an asteroid was approaching them.

A few of them would get onto the incoming rock itself and blasted off to pull the rock aside, while there were also members who would knock themselves into the rock from the side to deviate the orbit of the rock away from the ship. Some of them would also smash the asteroids with their weapons. If it was not D-6 they were piloting, everything felt like walking on thread.

Ye Chong's order was very effective. The situation was under control again.

After the first few incoming attacks, the bond between pilots grew stronger. As they were revolving about the spaceship, they would not have to worry about the rocks hitting them behind. And they believed in each other, letting their mates taking up the sides beyond their viewing scope, so it was less of a chore to protect the ship. Most essentially, they would confirm the coordinate upon seeing a giant rock beyond their control heading towards a specific spot. Then they would inform the warship to launch a stronger firearm to crush it.

It was a shame they had no ranged units or they would be having a winning fight. Only the real giant among the asteroids could do actual harm to the spaceship. They could have shoot everything down if they had ranged weaponry.

Because of the recent exposure to red-tailed beasts, Ye Chong had gained a habit of prioritizing close-combat models while almost all his trainees were made into melee fighters as well. A single type of troop would be the strongest in a particular situation while being the weakest in the others. Ye Chong had never foreseen the travel

to Calamitous Asteroid Belt, especially with such a substandard army.

This would be a good lesson, that no one could ever predict anything, even if you had a supercomputer to check out the trend. Murphy's law still stood strong. If anything could go wrong, it would go wrong. It was also this uncertainty that gave the world an irresistible charm.

But Ye Chong did not fancy the charm, so did the crew members on Haskel, as they all were tensed as ever. Master Jay (Ye Chong) had hardly an expression in the past but this time the grimness could be easily perceived by the crew.

They might have regained control of the situation, but Ye Chong remained pessimistic on it. He planned to discharge the combat units on the third day of travel, as a guarantee to lead them to safety, since based on the intelligence he had in hand, the density of the asteroid belt grew dramatically greater the deeper they ventured. And it was only the second day, he had already sent out his trump card.

Right when Ye Chong was worried of the danger tomorrow, the Gray Valley had something happened.

...(Somewhere near Kasent)...

A small team of mechs were carrying out their routine patrolling.

They had heard stories of red-tailed beasts showing up nearby, so they were assigned to watch out the area for the people.

"Wh-What is that! Holy Kasent!" screamed one of the pilots.

The others shifted their sight onto the screen.

They could feel goosebumps crawling every corner of their skin.

It was a conglomeration... a massive, dense, rumbling wave of red-tailed beasts dashing towards them... The pilots could perceive the sizes of the beasts being about the size of a standard mech

model. The skin was glowing in dark. The beasts seemed bulky with their muscles, the scarlet tip of their tails were swinging in aggression. The dark-red pupils of theirs were somehow illustrating the death.

"RUN! TALK LATER!" One of them shouted, which woke the others up from their astonishment. They turned up their engines and ran at full speed.

"Sec." And one responsible pilot remembered his duty and recorded everything to be sent back to the base on Kasent.

Chapter 504: Perseverance I

When the video reached Kasent, the entire planet exploded in chaos. People had begun to move to Kasent since a few days ago, but many still harbored illusions of their own. Besides, it was difficult for the civilians to find starships that allowed them to hitch a ride. For the moment, many civilians found themselves stuck on the planet.

It was mayhem in the cities. Mechs were flying around everywhere, trying to escape. Occasional explosions happened when mechs ran into each other. On the ground were the anxious masses, carrying their belongings and holding onto their children, their faces betraying fear and hopelessness.

The docking zones in the cities were also in a mess. The starships were all trying to depart, and the crowds on the ground were all trying to get a place on the ships. People were crying, yelling, begging ... The glorious cities were now reduced to a living hell.

The docking zone control centers were overwhelmed. Without instructions from control, the starships lifted off by their own discretion.

Suddenly, two starships in the air collided into each other. One of the ships suffered heavy damage to its tail engines, while the other ship lost its half its starboard side hull armor.

The two ships lost balance and began to spin in the air, struggling to regain their balance.

It was all futile in the end.

The two starships wobbled their way down from 900 meters up, like drunken sailors, and crashed heavily into the docking zone crowded with both starships and people.

Boom! Boom! Two loud explosions followed, and two humongous flames flared out. Debris sprayed out from the center of the

explosions.

The two fallen starships acted like ignition, and the docking zone, full of fuel, exploded.

One by one, the starships exploded like a chain reaction.

All around them, the crowded masses suffered from the explosions. They barely had time to scream before the flames engulfed them. People who were further away from the starships did not escape the effects of the explosions. The debris and fragments from the explosions came at them, burning hot and fast, piercing their bodies, cracking their skulls.

The injured lay in their own pool of blood, struggling, wailing in pain or fear. No one was left standing in the docking zone.

The predictions of the mysterious man, Jay, had finally come true on this day. The Heavens did not give the people who doubted or hesitated a sliver of chance. Reality was cruel and determined.

Only a meager few survived the incident. The rest had paid the full price of their decisions with their lives.

Just as Jay predicted, the red-tailed beasts arrived on Kasent three hours later, and completed their surrounding formation. Two hours later, they had secured the surrounding areas of the planet.

Thus, Gray Valley was divided into two parts.

The people who were surrounded by the red-tailed beasts panicked. When news of the invasion spread, ships that were headed for Kasent immediately turned back and headed for the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, hoping to get to the rumored warp jump point. They had no other choice.

The lucky survivors and the people who were watching from afar now witnessed the sudden appearance of a legendary genius. If the truth of Jay's victory before was not yet ascertained, no one doubted his abilities this time.

Jay's reputation rose to a whole new level. People honored him, praised him, worshipped him. In short, he was put on a pedestal.

The mysterious man Jay became an enigma. To the average person, he was the symbol of invincibility, and Gray Valley's last hope.

The people hoped that the man would appear once again. They prayed that he would survive the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. Many volunteers had begun their journey to Planet Spectre, hoping to join the remarkable fleet. They believed that the mystical Sir Jay would once again be victorious.

Ye Chong ordered for the ships to accelerate past this unstable region, but the floating rocks were too dense for higher velocities. They were still advancing slowly.

Casualties were reported every day, but never on the same scale as what happened in the beginning.

Ye Chong dared not be careless, however. It was already the third day, their last, in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. This was the most crucial part of their journey.

Distance-wise, they were already very close to the warp jump point. It was only 1,800 kilometers away. Usually, they would cover this distance in just an hour, but now they would have to take 12 hours.

They finally flew past the unstable region, but as the fleet advanced further, the pressure on them grew. Ye Chong was forced to assign all remaining 1,300 mech pilots on protection duty. With more manpower, their situation improved slightly, but five hours later, the situation became more difficult.

Ye Chong had no more extra personnel at his disposal.

With only seven more hours to go, they could only soldier on. The rest of the journey would be the most dangerous and hardest

part of their flight.

To reduce areas exposed to risk, the starships were positioned very close to each other, but this did not improve their situation by much.

The mech pilots guarding the starships in their mechs were exhausted, and they were beginning to suffer from casualties. Before this, none of the mechs had been reported damaged. Now, as the danger around them increased, they had finally reached a breaking point.

Ye Chong was deeply troubled by this.

The rocks all around them came crashing down on the starships like a heavy downpour. In just three minutes, they lost 50 mechs. It was no wonder Ye Chong looked so troubled. At this rate, they would lose all their mechs in just two and a half hours.

This was unacceptable for Ye CHong.

However, no amount of tricks and strategies were going to save them this time. The fleet members would have to persevere.

Ye Chong decided to step into the field himself. He had no concept of how leaders should not be in the frontlines.

He believed that every bit of effort would push them further towards victory.

Hence, he made his move!

Among the entire fleet, only Xi Qing, Shu and the other students had seen Ye Chong in combat. The rest had never seen Sir Jay fight. Even Xi Qing and Shu had never seen Ye Chong fight with a mech. To them, Sir Jay was their leader, more suited for strategizing.

No one realized that Sir Jay's expertise was in fact not in strategizing, but in actual combat!

When Sir Jay decided to step into the field himself, all of Haskel's

crew members were dumbfounded. They stared at their leader in disbelief.

Ye Chong did not give them the chance to object, only turning his back to them and leaving with determination.

When news of Sir Jay's decision came through the comms to the mech pilots who were struggling outside, everyone thought they had heard wrong.

When Ye Chong's Han Jia exited Haskel's Passage 1, the comm channels were flooded with thunderous cheers. Everyone felt their exhaustion evaporated. They were invigorated, they were ready to fight!

Ye Chong did not know how his actions had brought about this boost in morale in his soldiers. In fact, he believed that while he had improved from before, there was still much for him to learn before he could become a true leader.

Ye Chong only hoped that he could do his part in fighting for their survival. That was all.

The beautiful Han Jia danced across the dark outer space that was raining asteroids. Its beautiful body moved economically and with great precision. The mech was fast and powerful, a mechanical wonder to behold.

The mech pilots were surprised to find Sir Jay much stronger than they were. No matter how he asteroids rained on Sir Jay's mech, his agile mech would always be able to avoid the rocks, or used its weapons to deflect them.

Some of the larger rocks became Sir Jay's weapons. He used his mech to change the course of these rocks to collide into other rocks that were coming towards them.

Sir Jay's skillful and confident maneuvers had affected all the mech pilots. The comms channels once again roared with cheers. All the fleet members felt encouraged.

Right then, Sir Jay's mech was not the only one showing off. Beside him was a one-armed mech in blue and white. Its right arm held a Farqua sniper rifle. The unremarkable sniper rifle turned formidable in the hands of this mech.

The unknown mech pilot fought with extreme calmness. His shots never missed. The mech balanced between long range sniping and wide area coverage, demonstrating the skills of a long range mech in this dazzling battle.

The unknown mech pilot worked well with Sir Jay. They coordinated their movements perfectly. Sir Jay adjusted his position accordingly as the one-armed mech went about its near-supernatural shooting spree. The deadly rain of asteroids was no challenge for the two mechs. Shots of thick and thin blue lines fired through the air like a blooming flower, while the small and nimble Han Jia did its petal dance around the shots.

No one knew who the mech pilot in the one armed mech was, just as no one knew that Sir Jay was an ace mech pilot. Only the very first few members of the fleet could guess that the mech pilot in the one armed mech was the other leader they had, the one who never showed their face.

In the end, Shang could not help but interfere in this critical situation.

Chapter 505: Perseverance II

Of course it made a world of difference when Ye Chong and Shang worked together!

Sir Jay's fleet members got a morale boost because of his reputation amongst his people. To them, Sir Jay was walking the talk, impressing on them his will to fight till the end!

The performance of Sir Jay and his mysterious and strong partner was like an adrenaline injection to the fleet members, giving them strength to carry on.

...

Ye Chong never expected this.

It was too long ago since he had fought side by side with Shang. Now, he was enjoying the moment.

The rocks came from unexpected angles, and fast enough to strain him. Once, he was in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt by himself, giving chase to a single six-fingered red-tailed beast. Now, he had brought with him an entire fleet, massive enough to feel the effects of dangers within the asteroid belt.

The rocks came in waves like animals in a frenzy, attacking him ferociously and aggressively.

Instead of being afraid of this danger, Ye Chong felt very excited. He felt like he was unleashing all the energy that he had been saving recently. Every ounce of blood in him boiled angrily. The pores on his skin opened up, and he felt an electrifying sense of comfort running through him.

Nonetheless, his mind was still calm as ever. He enjoyed this sensation of calmness and excitement mixed together. Shang's appearance relieved him of the many feelings that he kept hidden in his heart.

Shang had not warned Ye Chong before he came out.

Fighting alongside Mu and Shang was an incredible experience. From the first time he set eyes on Mu and Shang, Ye Chong had never thought of flying the mech himself, but more as a friend, a teacher. As he grew older, one of his driving forces was to become stronger than the mech one day, so that he would earn the privilege of piloting the mech. However, deep down in his heart, Mu and Shang had always meant the same to him - the mech gave him meaning, like a student trying to prove himself to his teacher.

Mu and Shang's identity was a sensitive issue. The mech seemed to be closely related to the Xue Lai Clan. Hence, Mu and Shang preferred to stay in their dimension keystone most of the time. Besides, for a long time, Mu and Shang had been separated from Ye Chong.

They had long since fought together, side by side.

Just how powerful could Ye Chong be in his state of excitement?

Everyone in the fleet was shocked by Ye Chong's strength! Close range mechs could usually do little against these rocks due to their limited attack range. However, Sir Jay's attack range was about six times larger than a normal mech squad's. He did not even seem to be pushing himself.

The one-armed mech also had an astonishingly wide attack range. The mech covered an even wider range than Sir Jay, with its long range capabilities, amounting to about 10 times larger than that of a normal mech squad.

The two of them were fighting at the position where the fleet was receiving the heaviest damage, at the very front tip of the fleet.

The timely involvement of Ye Chong and Shang managed to stabilize the situation. The number of mech pilot casualties and deaths reduced drastically.

Additionally, with the two super powerful mech pilot clearing

the path at the front line, the fleet advanced significantly faster. The seven-hour journey could now be achieved in four hours.

Everyone felt optimistic again. They believed that the fleet could now reach their destination safely.

As the people expected, their situation was now under control. If everything went smoothly, they would arrive at their destination in another four hours if they held out.

Would these last four hours go as smoothly as they hoped for?

Perhaps Ye Chong and Shang were the only ones in the fleet who did not share this optimism. The fleet was safe for now, but they were only pushing their luck ever closer to their limit.

The fleet was like a spring, stretched longer and longer, not breaking at first. However, if the spring never stopped stretching, it would eventually reach a point where it would break.

Will they reach their destination before that breaking point, or not?

Deep underneath Ye Chong's state of calmness was a feeling a dread.

In fact, Ye Chong's feeling was warranted.

30 minutes before they reached their destination, when almost everyone in the fleet felt that they were going to make it after all, they reached their breaking point!

After more than three hours of intense combat, Ye Chong's body was beginning to tire. His defences were weakening. If even he was feeling the pressure, the other mech pilots suffered even more. Ye Chong was a little surprised to find the other mech pilots holding out for so long. Little did he know that it was a lot to do with him putting himself at the front line.

Bang bang bang bang bang bang! Suddenly, six balls of flames went up in the dark sea of asteroids. Six mechs had exploded!

Mech battles usually did not last very long. It was rare to have two sides of equal strength drag the battle on for an hour or two. Piloting a mech required concentration. If the fight dragged on, the pilot's mind would eventually become dulled.

This was a very risky state to be in. Mech pilots who reached this state would commit even the simplest mistakes, not because of their lack of training, but due to reaching the limits of what their mind and body would take. Of course, stronger mech pilots would not fall for this weakness so often. They could fight longer, and were mentally stronger.

The explosions of these six mechs were like the opening lines of the climax act. All at once, the other mech pilots began to show signs of breaking down.

One by one, the mechs began exploding again like fireworks. The comms relayed horrified cries, the loud sound of explosions, and the deadly silence that followed. The explosions happened again and again, and it was hard to keep track how many they had lost.

Even in the midst of the battle, Ye Chong was following their situation closely.

They were now in the situation that he had feared and dreaded.

Given the criticality of their situation, any delays on their side would have serious consequences. Ye Chong gave his next order without hesitation, "All combatants, return to your ships!" The exhausted mech pilots could do little now. In Ye Chong's words, the outcome did not warrant their efforts.

The mech pilots took their orders and dragged their tired selves back to the fleet.

As they made their way back, mechs continued to be hit and destroyed, leaving scattered debris in space. The mech debris crashed into the starships, damaging the hulls.

Ye Chong realized that they had reached the most critical

moment of their journey.

He felt an unusual calmness descended upon him. "All ships, full speed ahead!"

They could not escape from here. Instead of dying in the asteroid shower, it was better to go full speed ahead for the slightest chance of survival.

With the mechs gone, the starships on the outer edges of the fleet were now directly exposed to the asteroids.

Their hulls, already dented in many places, were now even more distorted as they received the full impact of the asteroids outside. However, the ships stayed in position, shielding the ships on the inner parts of the fleet from the rain of asteroids outside.

The fleet members in these ships knew that the inner ships carried their wives and daughters, their families and friends, their hopes. All this while, they had only watched Sir Jay leading a bunch of young people fighting against the red-tailed beasts for the basest reason – to survive.

Now that they needed people to step up, they volunteered themselves.

They did not view themselves as particularly honorable people. They were only betting their own lives for their families, their loved ones, to give them a chance to live. There were no regrets.

The starships on the outer edges held their positions with difficulty. The fleet members ignored the heavy shower of asteroid on their ships as they guarded the ships inside the fleet.

One of the ships took a direct impact from an asteroid over a hundred meters in diameter. It was a critical blow to the ship.

"Captain, we lost our gyroscope!" A crew member reported anxiously.

The captain had over 30 years of experience in his position. The

corner of his eyes ended with wrinkles. His hair was in a shade of light gray. Right now, he looked entirely calm. All 200 starships on the outer edges were led by experienced ship captains, since their mission required not only their courage, but wisdom as well.

The experienced and wise captain made the right decision, "Switch to emergency manual mode, maintain our flight speed and adjust our course outwards, away from the fleet. Inform the other ships immediately." If their starship lost control in this critical moment, the other ships behind them would be affected, and the fleet would lose its formation. The asteroids would then be able to pass through the opening, crashing directly onto the ships within the fleet.

Their starship slowly left the fleet as another ship went in to take their position.

"Wonderful!" The ship's crew cheered. They were satisfied, not at all saddened by their impending deaths.

"Get the ship under control, keep our ship parallel to the fleet. Let's send them on their way," the captain ordered calmly, his expression dignified, as though it was the natural thing to do.

The starship kept its hull parallel to the fleet. The ships that passed by were shielded from the asteroids by their starship. It was only for a few seconds, but it was the best they could do. As the fleet advanced further ahead, the crew members of the starship watched it leave from their windows, bidding farewell in their last moments.

Every ship that passed by them saluted their sacrifice. Mothers and daughters and lovers felt tears in their eyes. In the inner parts of the fleet, family members of the crew cried devastatingly.

The captains were all seasoned veterans, but they were still pained by this turn of events. However, they knew exactly what to do so that their sacrifice was not in vain.

The fleet advanced, full speed ahead.

Chapter 506: Perseverance III

The damage inflicted by the asteroids was compounded as the ships accelerated. While the warships continued to fire their cannons at the larger rocks that assaulted them, the other starships gave up on evasive measures and focused on advancing as fast as they could.

At the forefront of the fleet were Ye Chong and Shang, feeling the pressure mounting on them.

The asteroids were now coming faster at them. Ye Chong had to concentrate harder, dealing with the dangerous and life-threatening rocks. If any of the asteroids hit the ship directly, the chances of his own survival were near non-existent.

Shang had replaced his energy cell five times. He was now at the tip of the front most starship in the fleet.

All they could do now was buy more time with the ships.

Directly exposed to the asteroids, the starships began to fall one by one, losing control or exploding into flames. The fleet did not slow down because of these casualties. The asteroids in the area were disturbed by the rapid advancement of the ships.

The starship leading the fleet was exposed to most danger. It would have exploded a long time ago if not for Ye Chong and Shang holding the line. The hull was damaged beyond repair, but the starship continued stubbornly, leading the fleet.

Back in their ships, the mech pilots sat or lay down on the floor, looking up at the holographic screen that was showing Sir Jay and the one-armed mech fighting their battle.

No one made a single sound throughout.

The captains who were still alive shouted at their crew, ordering for them to push their way forward.

Abruptly, another ball of flames went up in front. Another ship had exploded! The ships following from behind did not decelerate as they plunged right into and through the explosion.

Time seemed to slow down. Every second stretched on for longer than it should be.

Ye Chong felt his hands growing heavier, but he could not afford to slow down. He could hardly think at all, much less keep up with their situation. He was now holding the line as best as he could. Sweat seeped through his combat uniform. He was panting heavily. His eyes were set on the holographic screen in front of him as he reacted according to the asteroids that came towards him. He could no longer anticipate and react as before. He was now operating entirely on instinct.

Shang was shooting less frequently now, but Ye Chong knew that it was not due to Shang himself. The Farqua sniper rifle was overheating.

However, to the eyes of the mech pilots who were resting in their ships, Sir Jay's mech was still moving ever so swiftly, attacking with great precision. The one-armed mech was still shooting the asteroids in a dazzling and crazy show of blue laser beams.

They were still not capable enough to tell that Ye Chong and Shang were now in a dire situation. If Ye Chong and Shang were in control at the beginning of their fight, they had now lost that control, dragged into the rhythm set by the asteroids that came crashing down on them.

After who knew how long, Ye Chong felt his mind slowing down even more. As his senses began to dull, someone yelled in the comms, "Look! Over there!"

Ye Chong felt reinvigorated. He knew that they were almost there!

Right in front of them was a clearing, about 25 kilometers across

and 150 kilometers long. The warp jump point's marker was there.

There were no asteroids in this stretch of space. The flying rocks mysteriously avoided entering the place.

The fleet pushed their way into the clearing without resistance.

"It's here! It's here!" The former space pirate felt overwhelmed by emotions. The captain had stayed in Haskel's control room, since he was the only one who had ever been to this jump point. He faced a tremendous amount of pressure throughout the journey. Many in the fleet treated him with animosity, believing that he was the cause of their predicament. Some suspected that the jump point was a lie, as they had never heard of a warp jump point in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt before.

Besides, the dangers they endured recently that led to the sacrifices of many of their comrades were directly due to this captain's idea. If he did not suggest this warp jump point earlier, would Sir Jay have thought of a better plan, perhaps one that did not require so many sacrifices?

As all these thoughts overwhelmed him, the former space pirate finally burst into tears.

The fleet was finally safe as they entered the clearing. In that moment, after more than three hours of intense combat, Ye Chong felt drained. He could barely lift a finger.

The fleet members were overjoyed. The joy of having survived put them all into a celebratory mood. True, they had not done their warp jump, but it felt like a success already! This interesting stretch of empty space had also convinced them of the reliability of this warp jump point.

When Ye Chong returned to Haskel, he was greeted like a king! The surviving starships aligned themselves in formation, like an army awaiting the king's inspection. Every fleet member saluted their leader. As Ye Chong entered through Haskel's hatch,

everyone on board came to welcome Sir Jay, the man who had once again led them to victory. They stood in two lines, crowding the narrow passageway.

Ye Chong had no choice but to step out of Han Jia.

In reality, he looked like a mess. Sweat had covered every inch of his uniform, like he had just come out of a shower. His face was glistening with moisture. Drops of sweat dripped off the ends of his hair.

"Salute!"

Everyone stood at attention, saluting him with formality.

"Welcome back, Sir!" Xi Qing and Shu bowed in unison, in an attitude that was close to worship.

"Welcome back, Sir!" The 900 odd crew members greeted thunderously.

Ye Chong did not know quite how to react. He had never experienced anything like it. He was more used to the silent way the Sang Tribe worked under his lead, no bells and whistles. What he needed was rest. Even a single step forward felt like hard work right now.

He quickly gathered himself, waved at them and said unceremoniously, "Back to your stations."

The one-armed mech had mysteriously vanished, but no one dared to pursue the matter. What else could they do? Ask Sir Jay himself about it?

In the wake of the joy of surviving, they began to grieve for the people they lost.

Ye Chong and his fleet recuperated for eight hours in the clearing. Who knew what was awaiting them on the other end of their warp jump! If they encountered a threat in their exhausted state, they would be incapable of even the barest self-defence.

Ye Chong did not spend all eight hours resting. In fact, he was pretty much restored after five hours. In these eight hours, the fleet reorganized itself, and the tally for casualties was done.

The figures were shocking.

Of the 150 starships placed on the outer edges of the fleet, only three survived. Six of the starships positioned deeper inside the fleet were lost. Of the 2,500 mech pilots they had, 600 lost their lives while another 400 were injured. Now, Ye Chong had only 1,500 mech pilots with battle-ready capacity. Most of the mech pilots died while retreating to their starships. The entire fleet suffered a total of 8,641 deaths.

However, now was not the time to contemplate on this matter. They faced a bigger problem, which was the actual warp jump itself.

Ye Chong made plans for all kinds of scenarios they might encounter after the jump, especially in deciding on a rendezvous point in case some ships got lost from the fleet. Ye Chong had been mostly lucky in the past, but warp jumps were prone to accidents in general, and the stakes were high this time. There was no room for carelessness.

After the preparations were made, it was time to leave. It was at this moment that Arwa's fleet reached the edges of the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

"Sir, we are a go," Xi Qing reported nervously. Besides him, Shu's expression betrayed nothing, but his tightly clenched fists showed how anxious he was as well.

Ye Chong nodded, "Let's go." Unlike Xi Qing and Shu, Ye Chong had been through more dangerous situations than this. All the preparatory work was done. The mech pilots were rested and ready for combat.

If the former space pirate was right, they would reach Planet

Spectre on the other side of the jump. Their preparations would be warranted.

Spectre was a strange place. Rumors were abound about the planet. It was shrouded in mystery ever since Gray Valley came into existence. Starships that went close to the planet simply vanished into thin air.

At first, many confident explorers went to investigate, but none of them came back. The planet became notorious. In the end, the Research Consortium had to set up an outpost in the vicinity to stop people from getting too close. Gradually, Spectre came to be a place that no one dared to approach. Not even the space pirates felt adventurous. It became an unspoken rule to space travelers of all trades.

Chapter 507: Spectre I

Most people did not believe him when the former space pirate captain said that the other side of the warp jump point was Spectre. No one had left the vicinity of the planet alive before – this was common knowledge for everyone from Gray Valley.

When Ye Chong inquired further, the captain explained that he and his crew were also shocked to find that they were very close to Spectre after they made the warp jump. They left immediately, and by whatever good luck the Heavens bestowed onto them, their escape went without a hitch. It was after they quietly circled their way around the Research Consortium outpost that they finally felt relieved.

Spectre was a dreadful place, but this sentiment could not be appreciated by Ye Chong, who was not from Gray Valley.

The empty stretch of space they were in was long enough for the ships to accelerate towards the warp jump point.

Everyone held their breaths when the first ship did the jump. On the ship were 500 mech pilots, all in battle gear, ready to engage. They were chosen to go through first out as a safety precaution. No one knew what was on the other side.

The first starship accelerated, then accelerated some more, and finally disappeared in a stream of light.

The second ship went, then the third ship ...

Haskel, Ye Chong's ship, went in fifth.

Beyond Gray Valley, the situation in He Yue Galaxy was worsening. The entire galaxy was now in a state of unrest. The Three Aristocratic Families were all dragged into the war against the red-tailed beasts. The Ye Family fared the best, but they were all barely holding the line. An army of red-tailed beasts had taken

control of the Gateway that led to Gray Valley. No one knew what was happening over there. However, the news was comforting to many of the people in He Yue.

Right now, starships carrying numerous civilians came in waves towards Yi Ju for shelter.

The Sang Tribe, a bloodline with a long history, finally resurfaced into the world. The Collision Army was no longer the assorted crew that people seemed to believe at first. They were the only army that had ever destroyed a red-tailed beast army. The Collision mech that looked like half fitted junk metal had become the symbol of power, a mech that many dreamed to have.

People who could manage long distance space travelling all went to Yi Ju to seek protection.

The Sang Tribe never rejected these refugees. Yi Ju was secluded, with a sparse population. Massive in-migration led to rapid developments on Yi Ju. Schools with high reputation all relocated to the planet. The Sang Tribe had inherited Ye Chong's thirst for knowledge, rendering special assistance to any academy that wanted to move to Yi Ju. They had first priority, and would sometimes even be aided by transport ships and escorts from the Sang Tribe.

That was not all. Highly skilled workers could apply for protection through the virtual world. The Sang Tribe would request, out of their strong influence, for the local authorities to send these people to Yi Ju. Nowadays, the Sang Tribe was a dominating force. People could hardly afford to say no to their requests. The routes that led to Yi Ju were cleared. In just a short moment, countless fleets bearing the flags of the Sang Tribe made their way towards Yi Ju.

Almost 70 percent of all the educational institutes in He Yue Galaxy had relocated to Yi Ju due to the Sang Tribe's policies. The planet was now full of talents in all fields. The once backwards Yi

Ju had grown into a planet with a huge advantage in technical skills and knowledge. Plenty of civilians were moved to the planets around Yi Ju. Currently, the seven planets around Yi Ju were under the control of the Sang Tribe. However, the cautious Sang Tribe did not expand its territory too quickly. Rapid expansion of power was dangerous to the Sang Tribe, which did not have enough people to back its power.

Most of the members in the leadership were from the Sang Tribe, such as Sang Pu. Qiu Man was tasked with government affairs. In fact, much of the governing structure came from her suggestions. Her expertise in this area won the approval of Sang Pu and his people, and she was unanimously voted to be the highest authority in matters of governance. On the other hand, Sang Pu was made leader of the Collision Army.

Qiu Man examined her situation expertly. She knew exactly what to do to survive. If she made any funny moves right now, it would be like digging her own grave. Their public enemy number one now was the red-tailed beasts. Who knew when Ye Chong would return! Qiu Man harbored a deep fear for that reserved young man.

Without Ye Chong with them, the Sang Tribe did not sink into a state of chaos. On the contrary, they took the opportunity to expand their forces.

Nevertheless, searching for Ye Chong had become the top most priority for the Sang Tribe. They had sent out massive search parties to find Ye Chong. Little Rock had even set up a cutting edge virtual world laboratory. He had much help from the education institutions that moved in to Yi Ju on this. With access to the virtual world, and Little Rock's terrifying competency, he had set up backdoors in almost every corner of the virtual world in He Yue. These backdoors allowed him to monitor almost everywhere in the galaxy, except for some central areas of the Three Aristocratic Families. He hoped to find Ye Chong through these backdoors.

Currently, the Sang Tribe faced a dilemma. Of the Three Aristocratic Families, the Xue Lai Clan, which fared the worst, had sent representatives to Yi Ju, requesting for assistance.

To help, or not to help. That was the question.

It was a difficult problem for everyone.

Should they decide to help, they would have to deploy the entire Collision Army. The safety on Yi Ju would be compromised. Besides, the journey over would be long, and the risks too high. They would definitely suffer heavily from this endeavor. Most of the Sang Tribe members were against this option. They would rather not sacrifice their own to help outsiders.

On the other hand, rejecting the Xue Lai Clan was not a simple matter. News of the Xue Lai Clan's request had somehow spread amongst the common people, invoking a massive uproar. These days, almost all the councillors of the education institutions and people of high status or reputation had come forward to Sang Pu and Qiu Man, asking for them to lend assistance to the Xue Lai Clan. It was not only the survival of the Xue Lai Clan at stake. Living in the vicinity of Xue Lai Clan's headquarters were numerous civilians.

If the Sang Tribe openly rejected to assist the Xue Lai Clan, the common people would surely turn their backs to them. The Sang Tribe's long nurtured relationship with the common people would be shattered. This would endanger their future as a whole. This was a conclusion that did not require Qiu Man's expertise to reach. Even a brute like Sang Tie understood the consequences.

The Sang Tribe was a strong militant organization. Their Collision mechs and outstanding war tactics made them the strongest force on the human side of the war. These were the advantages of the Sang Tribe. Their disadvantages were on the technical side of things. The Sang Tribe's scientific and technical knowledge were primitive compared to that of the Three

Aristocratic Families. These would be the bottleneck of the Sang Tribe's development moving forward. It was why Sang Pu and the leadership spent so much effort in recruiting the education institutions and high skill workers. They had enough talents for now, but still far from developing a technical edge.

If they did not handle this request properly, all their efforts before will go to waste.

If only their good sir was here! That was probably what most of them were thinking. In critical moments like these, they needed a leader who was willing to make decisions and act on them. However, their leader, Ye Chong was nowhere to be found at the moment.

After all the starships did their warp jumps successfully, Ye Chong exhaled in relief.

However, it was not time to rest just yet. This place was rumored to be cursed, and it intrigued Ye Chong.

This was a dangerous place!

Ye Chong organized his fleet into groups of starships so that the fleet would not be thrown into confusion if they were under attack.

"Conduct a maximum range scan of our surroundings." This was Ye Chong's second order, right after they organized the fleet.

"Sir! Red-tailed beasts sighted!"

Everyone paled when they heard the report. Even Ye Chong looked disturbed. They had rested, but the mech pilots were still far from being at their best. They were not fully ready for battle.

It was terrible news indeed if they encountered any red-tailed beasts right now!

Ye Chong did not panic, however. Calmly, he said, "Show me the

feed."

"Yes sir."

On the holographic screen were a few red-tailed beasts, floating in outer space, watching the brown colored planet that was Spectre. They were oblivious to the starships that were now behind them. Ye Chong was calm by now. They had no choice but to engage. They were too close to the red-tailed beasts. The odds of escaping were not in their favor. The red-tailed beasts were so much faster than their starships.

Instead of escaping, they should initiate an attack!

On the other hand, Ye Chong noticed that the red-tailed beasts were scattered around in a disorganized fashion. There were not too many of them, about 200 in total. To Ye Chong's fleet, this was only a tiny army.

Abruptly, Ye Chong stood up. "Zoom in and focus."

The staff in charge quickly executed the order.

"Zoom in further."

The image was further enlarged.

"Focus on the red-tailed beast."

Parts of a red-tailed beast took up the holographic screen.

Ye Chong's eyes twinkled. He said lowly, "The upper body!"

The camera angled towards the creature's upper body. The edges were blurry now, but the zoomed in view drew everyone's attention to something peculiar on the holographic screen.

Chapter 508: Spectre II

Wounds!

The red-tailed beast's upper body was covered with many small wounds that were hard to see from afar without zooming in.

Upon closer inspection, Ye Chong found that the creatures all looked tired and spent.

Ye Chong was surprised. He pondered on their situation, then asked, "Is Shu here? Xi Qing?"

"Here, sir!"

"Here, sir!"

Shu and Xi Qing answered simultaneously through the comms.

"Take 500 mechs each and kill those red-tailed beasts. Remember! Take it slow and steady!"

"Yes sir!" The two of them acknowledged.

The two young men were doubtful. Before this, Sir Jay had never asked them to initiate an attack. After all, they held the disadvantage in outer space. This time, Sir Jay had even asked them to drag on the battle, which was contrary to their fast paced battles before.

Even though Sir Jay's orders sounded unusual, they believed that there must be some reason behind them.

1,000 mechs came out from their starship and silently crept up to the red-tailed beasts. The 200 over red-tailed beasts were absorbed in watching something, oblivious to their ambushers.

It was when the 1,000 mechs completed their surround formation that the 200 creatures realized what they had fallen into.

Just when everyone expected a vicious battle to take place, the 200 creatures seemed to panic and tried to escape.

This was unusual, too unusual!

Xi Qing and Shu quickly noticed that something was different this time. Before, the red-tailed beasts they encountered would never give up without a fight. They had never seen a red-tailed beast flee from battle, much less an entire army of 200.

They began to understand what Sir Jay was thinking, but now was not the time to consider it further.

Xi Qing and Shu gave the same order, "Noose strategy!"

The noose strategy was designed by Sir Jay himself. Sir Jay had designed 13 strategies, and the noose strategy was the ninth. This was a typical strategy for when one had the advantage in numbers. It involved surrounding one's enemies, not engaging them directly, but slowly whittling down the enemies' stamina.

In past battles, Xi Qing and Shu had never used the noose strategy, since mechs could never keep up with the energy and strength of the red-tailed beasts.

While this was the first time they were using the noose strategy, they had no problem executing it. After all, they were by now familiar with all 13 strategies designed by Sir Jay.

The 1,000 mechs spread out wide, grouped in twos or threes. They blocked the red-tailed beasts, kept them surrounded and occupied. All the groups worked together, doing their parts, moving swiftly. They did not initiate attacks with the creatures, only stopping them from escaping. Like a noose, they wrapped around the enemy's neck, an inescapable death trap.

Soon, the noose strategy's effects became noticeable. Xi Qing and Shu also noticed by then what was wrong with the red-tailed beasts. It seemed the creatures had survived an intense battle, and were now exhausted from the fight. The 1,000 mech pilots may not have fully recovered, but they were more than enough to deal with these 200 exhausted red-tailed beasts.

After half an hour, none of the red-tailed beasts managed to escape. More importantly, they were able to catch 30 over red-tailed beasts alive. They had never had a live catch before.

Living red-tailed beasts would be invaluable for research purposes. This would allow the human side to find ways to eradicate these creatures. However, this was irrelevant to Ye Chong. He had no specialists on his end, and no effective way to contain these red-tailed beasts. In the end, he ordered for the 30 over red-tailed beasts to be killed as well.

With the 200 over red-tailed beasts dealt with, the tension in the fleet was relieved. It was bad news to encounter these creatures right after they escaped the dangers of the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

Ye Chong considered the situation. The red-tailed beasts seemed to have survived an intense battle, and they were watching Spectre. What happened here? What were they fighting against? Humans? Or other organisms?

The red-tailed beasts must have ended the battle not too long ago. They were watching something, and what was that supposed to mean? Ye Chong went through the details he observed and tried to understand them.

From the degree of exhaustion they were experiencing, the other side must have given them a good fight. However, both sides were probably an even match, or the red-tailed beasts would have escaped long ago, and not stay behind and watch.

They were watching Planet Spectre.

What happened there? The dirt colored planet had dark brown streaks across it. There was hardly any greenery. From the looks of it, Ye Chong would have thought it was a barren planet, unsuitable for life. However, he also knew that there were all kinds of weird living things in this world. If this apparently barren planet harbored life, he would not be surprised.

He decided to investigate. He had a feeling that they would find something interesting.

This was not the kind of feeling that mentalists have, not their strong premonitions. Even so, Ye Chong could not ignore his gut feeling. He knew that whatever he felt was the result of his accumulated experience. There must be something that his conscious mind did not quite grasp, but understood somewhere deeper in his subconscious.

Xi Qing and Shu objected to Sir Jay's risky decision, but they were powerless against him. They could only be comforted by the fact that Sir Jay was an excellent mech pilot, and his mech was of no ordinary make. No matter what was down there, he should have no problem defending himself.

Ye Chong took Han Jia and flew towards Spectre. Shang was with him.

"Sigh, ain't no pretty ladies there, I don't understand why you insist to go!" Shang said disapprovingly, then added something that Ye Chong simply had no reply to, "Could it be that you're so deprived that you don't really care anymore? Err, doing it with an animal? Or it this some cross-cultural kind of love?"

Even with Ye Chong's solemnity, he could not help but rolled his eyes. He did not answer back, since he knew that Shang would only get more and more into it if he did.

Shang continued with mock earnestness, "Ye, you gotta control yourself, Bing Bing is waiting for you! Take it easy, take it easy now."

Ye Chong could not stand it anymore. "Shang, can you shut up?"

"Hehe, Ye, how about I share my divine ladies album with you? It's all the latest graphics! Actual size holographs, accurate measurements, best collection in town. I'll add on the latest Dragon Tiger Battle vid for free, what d'you think?"

Ye Chong ignored the mech.

"Alright alright, looks like I have to bring in the big ones. You'll definitely love 'em. Bing Bing, Feng Su, Lunatic Guan, or Qiu Man. Just tell me which one you want. Ye, I'm only offering since we're such old time friends," Shang continued to entice him.

Ye Chong was unmoved. He kept his eyes fixed on the holographic screen.

Shang sneered, "Ye, people shouldn't suppress their emotions, it's not healthy! Man's gotta do what he has to do. What's the use of having a big heart? To love them all of course -"

Abruptly, Shang's blabbering stopped.

Not knowing what he was up to know, Ye Chong remained silent.

After three minutes, the mech still did not say anything.

Five minutes later, it looked like Shang had simply disappeared. Ye Chong grew worried and asked, "Shang, what is it?"

It was 10 seconds later when Shang replied lazily, "Mu was saying, a man has to be strict to himself. Devotion is the best option."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Ye Chong could not understand.

"I asked him that too," Shang continued listlessly.

The mech explained, "In the end, Mu said, 'It conserves energy.'"

Ye Chong did not quite understand that, but he nodded, "Yes, Mu's right." It did not matter what Mu really meant, but conserving energy was always a good thing. He did not muse further on the relationship between being devoted and conserving energy.

The two PSI's and one human pondered on a very human topic.

...

Spectre had a thick atmosphere, so Han Jia had to slow down during its descent. Shang had came out of its dimension keystone and flew alongside Han Jia.

Not knowing what was underneath, Ye Chong moved cautiously.

The two mechs descended rapidly.

"Fly straight ahead," Shang told Ye Chong. Shang's holographic scanning system was much better than Han Jia's after all.

Ye Chong followed his lead.

Mountain ranges sprawled across the ground below. Deep valleys separated the mountains. Han Jia and Shang flew along one of the mountain ranges.

"Ye, look!" Shang no longer sounded light-hearted. He was now in serious mode.

Han Jia's photon processor brought up a video feed.

It was a red-tailed beast! A dead one, it seemed. It was lying quietly on a rock. Its face was peaceful, and its dark crimson eyes looked back lifelessly.

Han Jia and Shang landed beside the body of the creature.

"Died not too long ago," Shang concluded. There was still some warmth in the body, but the skin had started growing loose.

Ye Chong quickly noticed something else. "Shang, over here!"

Han Jia leaped to a spot not far from the creature's body. There lay the remains of a damaged mech.

Chapter 509: Spectre III

There was a rather giant hole at the cabin of the mech, which should be the "creative" work of the red-tailed beast. Ye Chong shook his headN no one would have survived from that tail attack under such circumstance. Ye Chong had seen this model before, twice - the first being back in Crysound where he saw 10 golden units zooming by in the sky at the ruin; the second being at Centuria University, during which 12 mechs were fighting against 5 red-tailed beasts, the golden mechs joined as a trio and stole the kill immediately. That was the only time Ye Chong ever saw the golden mech performed.

Well, the pilots of the trio were not particularly good, not as competent compared to himself, but they certainly had no problem handling the red-tailed beasts even in a 2 on 1 fight. Practically speaking, only an elite could fight off a red-tailed beast alone.

Judging by the debris of this mech, it should belong to the series of those golden mechs, though the weapon setup was a little different - the mech was wielding a golden ancient lance. Ye Chong believed in the capabilities of this ex-pilot, he or she should be about the level of the trio he encountered.

But that would be odd. Assuming they were at similar levels, it should not be a problem for this pilot to knock out one red-tailed beast. The pilot should have won. And that was when Ye Chong noticed the few tiny scratches around the debris. The layout of the scratches were messy, which some looked pretty new on top of the older ones. However, these scratches weren't old. That would mean the mech had suffered a considerable amount of damage before encountering a red-tailed beast. It was in another fight, an intense fight too.

Han Jia proceeded with his team, only to discover more debris of mechs along with carcasses of the red-tailed beasts. Some of the carcasses still looked fresh, while some had darkened with dried

body fluid all over the body. And again, the debris resembled the same mech series Ye Chong had first spotted. The shocking discovery however was the burn marks across the carcasses which was clearly caused by heat ray firearms. They also found out a golden mech armed with ranged weaponry. It was a golden laser shooter, of a real, non-streamlined mechanical design with the code "G-Z" printed.

It was the first time Ye Chong saw a ranged weapon that could hurt the red-tailed beast.

"Such gun!" Shang hurriedly discarded his Farqua and picked the G-Z up, "I knew it, it's a good gun," he muttered. Well, it was a good gun indeed, but... it looked kind of odd being held in the hands of a blue-white mech. Gold with blue and white?

Shang turned on the gun and shot once. A golden beam with breadth of an arm escaped the muzzle and created a crater on the rock nearby. Clear burn marks could be seen around the edge of the crater. The golden beam had a strong color, the energy seemed highly condensed, probably the most condensed ray Ye Chong had ever seen, not even the laser cannon of a spaceship could be this condensed. A laser fired by spaceship weaponry might be far brighter and broader but could never be as condensed as this, which explained why the golden beam could cause actual damage on red-tailed beasts.

The next discovery after G-Z was the number of debris around.

They had at least discovered over 200 scraps of such golden mech model around, while the carcasses of red-tailed beasts should go up to 400. That would mean... at least 200 supreme pilots had been here, while... there were more ahead of them.

Ye Chong was pretty much astonished.

No word could be used to describe the earth-shattering experience he had.

If there was only one pilot or a pair of these pilots, Ye Chong would not be surprised as it would clearly be just another tragedy of exploring pilots being engulfed by the beasts. But there were at least 20 of them, all elites and whoever owning them must only be from either of the aristocrats, or an organization with a similar authority - an authority as strong as the Sangs perhaps.

But they were in Gray Valley, so obviously, only Research Consortium could have owned these!

Research Consortium was the sole force that could possibly fight against the aristocrats...

However... would that mean...

Ye Chong pulled the lever and proceeded, his speculation grew stronger in his head, as he sighted more debris and carcasses, the craters and the burns.

It must be a brutal fight.

Both Ye Chong and Shang remained silent. Caution would be the topmost priority now. The place was blatantly a hazardous zone. They had heard stories about Spectre and there was simply no way the folks could cook up these stories out of nowhere. There must be something going on, although Ye Chong had yet encountered anything that spelled "hazard". There were only surprises so far. He never expected the consortium would send men to check out here, a large troop it was too. It was a relief however, the sight of these debris had proven that the consortium frequented this area, they must be watching out from somewhere too.

Han Jia dashed forward with Shang wielding G-Z as followed carefully behind. Shang would cover Ye Chong if anything went wrong. They accelerated, disregarding the messes around them.

Ye Chong had fully recovered from the shock.

They could not find anything alive.

They then took a break after five minutes. They seemed to have

found the target.

It was a valley of a breadth about 5 kilometers, where one could see the steep, rocky walls below the cliff into nothing. The dust on the ground would swirl occasionally as a gale blew by. The valley supposed to look grand, but it was all clogged by the metallic debris and bloody carcasses. Ye Chong could imagine the smell of bloodshed.

"Ye, 3534 dead red-tailed beasts had been detected," reported Shang something important.

Now Ye Chong could estimate the scale of the war, though the figure was a bit of a shocker to him. They discovered over 200 carcasses the very first moment they got to Spectre, summing all up the number of red-tailed beasts should reach about 4000, which was a horrible number for humanity.

That explained the heat detection from some of the carcasses by the system. The carcasses were indeed fresh. It was not war of a single day, the war must have lasted for days - that would justify the piling carcasses.

Both Ye Chong and Shang then zoomed to the very bottom of the valley and hovered a few meters above, they certainly would not want to tread upon the disgusting bin of the slaughterhouse.

Ye Chong took a look around, something caught his eyes. There seemed to be a piece of rock loosened from the edge of the wall. He zoomed in with his camera and revealed a corner of an alloy plate behind the rock. The piece of rock was leaning against the wall, so one would not be able to see anything unless from side.

It was a camouflage!

An alloy plate... It must...

It must be a base! There's a base right here?

Ye Chong suddenly worked up.

The discovery alone was more than enough to make the entire Gray Valley boil. The creepy planet, Spectre, had a secret base. For what? Why? Those would be the interesting part of the story. Spectre had always been rumored as the most terrifying, ghostly, paranormal place by the residents in Gray Valley. Well, the name "Spectre" was self-explanatory. But the discovery of this gate started to make Ye Chong feel that if those rumors were an intended propaganda to keep this base forever in the dark.

"Kek!" Shang laughed, "Spectre of the Spectre huh?"

Ye Chong's mind ran fast as he suddenly remembered the golden debris they encountered before. Perhaps, those elite pilots were not camping somewhere near Spectre but in Spectre itself! Right inside this base! Well, that would make better sense. No way the consortium would invest its precious elite workforce in guarding a haunted planet merely for "safety" of the people who would "accidentally" trespass the area. The workforce was meant for guarding something really, really important on the planet, like this base for example.

They pulled the rock off and system said it was another pitch darkness welcoming them.

They turned on holographic translation to reveal a pathway within. The gate was huge, about 200 meters tall and 300 meters long. The two pieces of alloy were tightly shut together and were covered with a thick layer of rocks. It was a clever design to utilize the darkness and the rocks of the valley to keep everything in stealth.

Han Jia flew into the gap between the gate. Shang tailed after and prompted the holographic detection system to project the visual.

It was a region far more spacious than Ye Chong imagined beyond the gate. It almost felt as if it wasn't a base. It felt more like a city, like the Nine Gates City, the same underground urban

jungle he had been to!

And Ye Chong was not wrong. He was welcomed by also a city, only much more larger than Nine Gates! His sight could not reach the end of it despite viewing from height. The city seemed to have far more superior technology than Nine Gates. Well, the height of each building justified it. Even the lowest building had a height of 20 kilometers, while mechs were flying smoothly inside.

The top of the sky was giving off a gentle white light. You would never be able imagine how there was a white glow coming off your head, showering towards every zone within the proximity of a few hundred meters. It was a really soothing glow yet it gave the entire city daylight. It was as if Ye Chong was the god, bestowing the underground the light. Ye Chong took a closer look at the top, only to find out the source of light being a kind of moss...?

The roof of the underground world was veiled by a layer of glowing moss.

Ye Chong thought Nine Gates was the greatest, that it could send him a stunning spell, that he thought he would be immune to anything else ever since, yet he zoned out a little upon seeing the city.

The catch was... despite it being the probably the fascination of civil development itself, the city was silent, horrifyingly silent, like a dead city.

Ye Chong lowered the altitude, only to see something.

Chapter 510: Spectre IV

On the ground it was a familiar sight.

Bodies of people, carcasses of red-tailed beasts, debris of mechs and the stench of blood.

The city looked all grand and majestic afar, yet it turned out to be a hollowed sculpture at a closer look. There were splashes of blood over the fair white wall, and the buzzes of flies.

The stench of blood circulating in the air seemed to have grown spiking and choking in Ye Chong's nose.

There were far more deaths in the city compared to the outside. The pilots outside were at least armed to last a few turns from the red-tailed beasts' attack, but these were the ordinary citizens which probably immediately pounced to death. Their uniforms had clarified their identity. They were the non-combat units, the technicians perhaps. Not many golden mechs could be seen around. Instead, the standard models filled up the streets, of different colors yet all unarmed.

Ye Chong might have undergone countless wars and seen countless deaths, yet the sight was shaking him a little.

Judging by the size of the city, the population should have easily 300,000, yet Ye Chong could not see, or even hear any survivor around.

Everything was dead, both the people and red-tailed beasts.

Including the red-tailed beasts here, the figure should already be over 5000. That was enough to cause a mayhem in Gray Valley.

Ye Chong could now synthesize the entire event in his mind. So this city should be an important investment by the Research Consortium to perform something, which could be justified by the vast number of elite pilots around. And to make sure that there would not be any uninvited guests from Gray Valley, they had

begun spreading creepy rumors about Spectre. They probably paid a few people to get the ball rolling.

But somehow, one day, unfortunately, the red-tailed beasts could smell them underground, so the beasts launched an attack upon them. Nonetheless, similarly, the red-tailed beasts were also unfortunate as they had underestimated the vastness of consortium's force, so the war was too intensive and had lasted for too long.

The red-tailed beasts still fought hard for some reason, which led to the scene now.

"Follow me, Ye." It sounded like Shang's usual tone of big discovery, as he zoomed away the moment the last syllable rang.

And Ye Chong hurriedly pulled the lever to launch Han Jia's engine.

The city was utterly destroyed. One could already call it a ruin for real. Both Han Jia and Shang weaved in and out from one crumbled building to another, rapidly.

Out of sudden, Ye Chong's face looked drained, as he spotted something on his screen.

There was a small group of red-tailed beasts barraging the alloy gate where a golden mech stood behind it.

The golden mech's sword was broken into half and the mech itself was full of scratches. Its shield was long gone and it was holding the thrashing beasts back at its best. It was protecting someone, a man seemingly who looked wounded at the back.

The beasts were having fun apparently, as Ye Chong could identify a few chances to break through the defense and annihilated their last two targets. Yet, the beasts never did it and just thrashed blindly.

Ye Chong could also see the mech losing anytime soon.

"Shang, go!" he shouted and instantly launched himself towards the mech. It was no longer an issue of identity, whether the raided pilot being a friend or foe. Under the attack of red-tailed beasts, every human would be his friend.

Zap!

A golden beam took over Ye Chong and struck on head of one of the red-tailed beasts.

The broad golden beam, as if the judgement from heaven, penetrated the skull of the beast.

The other beasts, upon noticing the sudden attack, got panicked.

Klink!!!

The three crimson arrows crushed the struggling golden mech, which one of them pierced the cabin. The pilot probably had been sacrificed.

Even the calmest snow hill would have an avalanche due to spark of heat. That was Ye Chong's feeling when his eyes lost the glow and fully accelerated his Han Jia.

The golden mech should be dead, yet its arms began constricting the 3 tails that impaled its body.

The 3 red-tailed beasts were struggling to withdraw their tails, while their one free compatriot was going to help them, yet - Zap another golden ray passed by Ye Chong and sent that red-tailed beasts rolling on the ground.

Han Jia pulled out its daggers and stormed by the three red-tailed beasts.

"Awrrrrrrr..." Their eyeballs enlarged drastically, as they wailed loud. A fine lining of blood was streaming off their neck.

Thump! Thup! Thump!

The three heads had fallen to the ground.

The golden mech was still gripping the tails and did not take any further action, as if stoned.

Well, that was a clear sign.

Ye Chong sighed softly as he looked into the opened cabin. The pilot was already dead.

He gently pulled the mech to the side. Ye Chong had high respects towards the sacrifice. The pilot had fulfilled his or her duty - to protect the people - till the very end. Shang lifted his new toy, "G-Z" and walked to Han Jia's side.

There was a moment of silence till Ye Chong turned to the wounded man behind.

Ye Chong got off Han Jia and walked to this man.

The man had a square face and thick brows. He might look weak, still he exuded a kind of solemnity. Nevertheless, he did not seem to be in the best shape at the moment. There was a severe cut on his left chest. The cut started from his collarbone, all the way to the end of his ribs. Ye Chong could see the bones revealing from the open-wound.

He frowned, such injury, he thought. The chances of surviving would be very low. He could help bandaging simple injury, but this was far too serious. Ye Chong was not a certified physician after all.

The man's lips wriggled, as he breathed faintly his words.

"...Bag...bag... potion... blue... potion..." That was what Ye Chong heard when he approached the man.

He naturally lowered his eyes and noticed there was indeed a bag, about size of his palm, resting at the waist of the man. The design seemed luxurious yet not practical enough for Ye Chong's taste. The number of buttons were not helpful in getting things out of the bag. A bit of his strength was applied and the buttons hopped everywhere.

There was a blue potion, as the man had said, inside an injection-gun for medical uses probably. Ye Chong took the gun out and brandished in front of the man, to convey understanding.

The man used the ounce of strength he mustered to make two nods.

Ye Chong removed the cover at the needle tip and stabbed it into the right arm of the man. He pressed the trigger and injected everything into the man.

"Ahhh.... HAHHHHHHHH!" The man roared profoundly like a beast, as his body vibrated vigorously. For the past 30 seconds he shuddered continuously and slowly regained his serenity after.

The former pale face of the man had now become rosy.

Right when Ye Chong was showing deep concern towards this man, the changes of event were not in his script.

The man was no longer weak, as he got up like a normal person. Ye Chong intuitively grabbed the neck of the man and pushed him down the ground. If the man would like to do anything funny, his neck would be ripped.

"My, my, relax, I meant no harm," said the man wryly.

Ye Chong's hand was not moving an inch.

The situation was getting strange. This man was horribly injured, breathing dead a second ago and now he had fully recovered while having the mood to sound cheeky. Furthermore, the wound was still bleeding on his chest, anyone with such wound would have collapsed at this point, yet he was standing up.

"I am fairly intrigued. Who are you guys? How do you find this place?" the man asked curiously, as if there was no hand wrapping his neck.

There was no reply from Ye Chong. He glared right into the man's eyes and asked, "Who are you?"

"Hah. I'm Kui," the man introduced himself, with a bright smile.

Kui? I had never heard that name before.

"What is this place? What's that blue potion and what is it for? "

Kui raised his brows and looked at Ye Chong interestingly, "This place is known as the central base of the Research Consortium. The scientific name for that blue potion is called Nerve-sustaining Reagent. Its effect is to give a person with injury beyond healing an additional 5 hours to live at maximum. Within the 5 hours, the person would act as if unhurt, not feeling any form of pain. But the person would die the moment after that. The side-effect of this potion? Well, it makes the person impossible to cure."

Kui sounded so calm, as if he was not the one who took the potion.

Ye Chong observed the parts of Kui. His skin and his physique showed nothing about the warfield. He should be a non-combat member. Well, Ye Chong never expected this futuristic city being the central base of the Consortium. He once thought this was a mere base for a more major scientific research project. That explained the overwhelming number of guards around.

Ye Chong loosened his grip and sat in front of Kui.

"Haha... Looks like we are on business?" Kui smiled briefly upon seeing Ye Chong's gesture.

He was relaxed at first, till he looked at Shang, his pupils shrunk drastically, "You are the people of Xue Lai clan?!"

Chapter 511: Unexpected Profit I

"Uhh... Wait... Never mind..." he muttered, shaking his head right after the out-of-the-place question. "No way, yeah, no way. The Xue Lai clan is also in a sticky situation now, no way they could have someone here for treasure-hunting... Although that model bears a resemblance to Xue Lai's model a lot..." He pondered.

His confused sight fell upon Shang again but this time, the expression changed, "Wait, is that... no... impossible... forget it..." he thought deeply with his eyes partially shut.

"We aren't from Xue Lai," said Ye Chong, with a tilt made towards the man. "Do you recognize this mech?" The man's statement was truly intriguing, Ye Chong had been fairly curious of Shang's identity the whole time.

"Huh? Uh, umm..." His eyes grew clear, "I think I made a mistake, sorry." He looked at Shang again, "I don't recognize this mech, not at all. That aside, how did you guys find this institute in the first place?"

Ye Chong, a little disappointed, sat up and briefed the man his adventure there.

"Mhm..." Nodded Kui, "It is not easy to make such judgement at times like this. I'm certainly impressed by your decisiveness. You're pretty much a hero, one with a fortune too."

Ye Chong had no interest in the compliment, he just took a look around, "Anyway, what had happened here?"

"We got attacked," Kui replied expressionlessly with slight grief in his tone. "About 6000 red-tailed beasts came to the place we did not manage to hold them outside. They intruded the base and a massacre happened. Nobody had survived, I presumed. Until now we still have no idea of how these beasts discovered our secret

base. I guess they smelled us, but who I'm kidding with?" Kui's eyes reddened, he became choked in tears.

"Why none of you seek assistance from the outside?"

"Nah, we aren't as lucky as you, hero boy." Shook Kui, "Our transmission towers were destroyed by the red-tailed beasts upon arrival. We could not send anything out. It was a long defense war that lasted for months and we thought time would be on our side, that someone or some ships would notice the warring here and come to rescue, but no one had come. There was indeed our army camping near the planet, but they were fully unaware of the existence of this central base."

There were regrets in his word.

Upon recalling the chaotic moves by the Consortium recently, Kui's words made sense to Ye Chong out of sudden.

"I see..."

"What did you see?" asked Kui.

Ye Chong then briefed Kui the terrible actions taken by the Consortium in Gray Valley. Kui could not help but to feel even more remorseful, as he began wailing and thrashing a little.

It took a while before Kui became calm again, he stood up, his lifeless eyes gazed upon the ruins of the once-magnificent, "Well... Looks like it's the end for the Consortium," he muttered.

Ye Chong did not reply. The Consortium was no longer what it used to be. It was an organization with only name by then. It was evident as this very ruin was formerly the center of the Consortium, the consolidation of all their forces, the core of the entire research magnificence, and it fell, as the war arrived uninvited. It was only natural for Kui to have such dramatic reaction upon seeing such a formidable organization being wiped out unknown to the public.

"Well!" Rose Kui, "Let's go. I'll show you around. I'll let you see

the area with the best, the topmost, the highest end technologies in the entire Gray Valley. It should not look shabby even compared to the the core of the Aristocrats! The laboratory of Consortium!" He turned away with the last bit of pride.

Ye Chong followed the proud man, as curious he was towards the mysterious consortium.

The security was pretty tight there, as they had to hold their steps before a locked gate every 20 meters. Kui turned his face to Ye Chong, "This is the only pathway to the laboratory. And hardly anybody knows the code."

"So what are you in the Consortium?" asked Ye Chong, with instinct screaming at him that Kui must not be a simple subordinate in the Consortium.

"Me?" Hah! I'm just an engineer," replied Kui indifferently.

Just an engineer? Likely story. It sounded like a blatant lie to Ye Chong, but he did not see the point in pursuing it. He moved on with another question, "Why did your organization decide to build the center here?" There was nothing peculiar about Spectre. To Ye Chong, Spectre was just like the other planets, he could not see the point of investing so much time and money on building a base here, especially when the Consortium worked so hard on fabricating horrifying rumors just to keep people away.

"Well, this has always been the biggest secret of the Consortium but there's no longer a need to make it a secret, not anymore, I guess," said Kui casually. "At first... Mhm... probably some time before the Gray Valley has been established... we discovered something here."

"What was it?"

"We found a handful of Teardrops and a very unstable phenomena, a distortion window." Kui's description reminded Ye Chong a lot of the underground cave where he also discovered a

few Teardrops and the distortion horror.

"Regarding Teardrops, it need not to convince people of its rarity I believe. We were more interested in the window. The Consortium was fully invested in Space Science researches. And clearly a spatial distortion phenomena would be a hidden shortcut to the other galaxy, also another galaxy unknown to the people would be a giant treasure chest to be opened. You know about the Aristocrats, don't you?"

Ye Chong nodded.

"All the three Aristocrats owned a shortcut that would lead them to the Five Galaxies, respectively. And these 3 pathways were also an unstable spatial distortion phenomena when they were first discovered. Perhaps you were unaware of this, it's alright, it's a major secret among the Aristocrats, not many residents of He Yue knew it," smiled Kui.

"I know, I am from the Five Galaxies, after all," nodded Ye Chong.

Kui nearly tripped himself upon hearing the statement, "You're a resident of the Five Galaxies? Which?"

"Fal."

"Oh?" Kui took a careful look at Ye Chong, "Not bad. You were able to come this far. Though, how do you associate with the Aristocrats?"

"Not much of an association." Shook Ye Chong, "I was being hunted."

The interest intensified on Kui's expression, "Hunted... huh? Well, you must be really something that the Aristocrats could chase you all the way here. And you survive well too. Which of the Aristocrats?"

"Hah..." Ye Chong smiled bitterly, "All three..."

Kui was stupefied and he laughed out loud, "Ahahahahaha! Man,

you have such luck. All three families want you dead? Hahaha! Seriously I wonder what you have done that it could drive all 3 families this mad!"

"They were too strong...", said Ye Chong briefly, "And I felt threatened of my life."

"Well..." Shrugged Kui, "Let's not talk about that. No point of dwelling in the past. You are in luck now, the Aristocrats are too busy to even track you. Still, it almost felt impossible for you to get back home now."

Ye Chong was speechless. That had always been the pain in his heart.

"And here we are," reminded Kui. "This is the room where we store the chips, containing every report, the outcome of our researches. Well, they'll be piling dust anyway so feel free to take any if you like. Every research was a brave and tremendous attempt by the researchers who drained themselves completely for their passion. Some even took their whole life just for a small piece of report. If they knew their life effort eventually became part of the ruins unknown by the people, I guess we won't have a fine reunion when I met them in heaven," said Kui, a little sentimental.

Ye Chong was astounded.

It was ... a giant library of microchips. A sea of them specifically, in all sorts of colors, labeled by an array of categories, stored chronologically as well as based on the field involved.

Ye Chong could see at least 300,000 microchips there,

"Hehehe..." Shang was there, stunned. yet his beeps formed unintelligible giggles, "Ye, we'll be rich. We will be rich!"

Ye Chong's breaths intensified. He was sort of a researcher after all and he certainly recognized the value of these data streams. These would be strength, the greatest strength and wealth, that one could use to build a family as competent as the Aristocrats.

"If you want to know the exact number of chips here, sorry, I don't know." Kui sounded really depressed, "We started from Space Science, then Mechanical Researches, and then the Biological Science today. We almost have every scientific field covered. We even have a breakthrough in our latest research but well... you know what happened. An annihilation, as if a punishment from the heaven..."

Ye Chong's once excitement had also been assaulted by the raining tails of the crimson beasts, the bloodshed of the researchers.

"You sure are interesting," smiled Kui as he looked at Ye Chong's expression.

"Why don't you give me some recommendations?" asked Ye Chong. There were too many chips here, he really would appreciate someone giving their opinion on the choices. Well Kui should be fine with this, if he truly intended to give him the chips, that is.

"Uhh..." Kui flinched and hurled a smile promptly, "Okay, what do you need?"

"Which field do you guys have most researches on?"

"HMMMMMMMMMMMMMM... At first, we focused on Space Science, as I've said, then Mechanical Science, did you see the mechs out there? Yup, those are our creations."

"Nah, keep those," shook Ye Chong. Space Science was too foreign for Ye Chong's comprehension, while Mechanical Science? It was interesting to see those gold fighters flying out there but they were not the best mechs out there, especially when compared to the aces of the Aristocrats.

He was a mechanic after all. He believed he could build a better mech if he had sufficient materials.

So yeah.

Chapter 512: Unexpected Profit II

Kui looked at Ye Chong with an unreadable expression, "Well, looks like you know your stuff!"

He continued, "We got interested in biological research about a century ago, and made great discoveries." He sounded modest, but Ye Chong could see that he was filled with pride.

"I've always been interested in biology since I was young. I believe that life is the world's greatest mystery, and the pinnacle of all secrets." Kui looked nostalgic as he recalled, "That's why I've been involved in the field since I was very young. In the end, I ended up in research just as I wanted. You can't imagine how much better we are in biology compared to other people. We have a lot to catch up in spatial science and mechanics when compared to the Three Aristocratic Families, but even all three of them combined will not be a match for us in biology."

Kui sounded proud just then, and a little arrogant.

Ye Chong said nothing. He did not doubt Kui's claim. The Three Aristocratic Families were not known for their strengths in biology. Ye Chong knew little about biology, but he was familiar with one field that was intimately related to biology, and that was alchemy. Lunatic Guan's extraordinary alchemy skills still continued to amaze Ye Chong. He still could not figure out the Guan Family's auto-analytics mechanism that Lunatic Guan came up with.

Nevertheless, he did not approve of Kui's declaration that biology was the world's greatest mystery. The way he saw it, every field of knowledge had its own intricacies, and it would be meaningless to compare between them. Kui's view was too biased.

"Have you studied biology before?" Kui asked.

"No, but I've learned alchemy for a while."

"Alchemy?" Kui grew excited, "Not bad, not bad, alchemy is a branch of biology."

He lowered his head in thought, mumbling to himself, "Perhaps, giving it to him will be a wise choice."

Ye Chong did not catch his expression. He was still talking to Shang.

"Ye, this guy is definitely not some average Research Consortium engineer," Shang warned Ye Chong, sounding certain of himself.

"Why do you say that?" Ye Chong asked. He did not see anything particularly outstanding about Kui, apart from his easy going demeanor.

"Humph, there are too many signs of suspicion! How would a normal engineer know so many secrets?" Shang noted disapprovingly, then laughed, "But Ye, don't worry about it for now, he's not looking to mess with you yet."

Kui seemed to reach a decision then. He looked up at Ye Chong and said, "Come with me."

Kui walked out of the memory chip room and entered another corridor. The corridor went downwards. A traveller moved them along the corridor.

Kui turned back to Ye Chong and said, "Better keep that. You can't fly in here. If the system detects any flying objects, security will automatically retaliate."

"He's right," Shang whispered to Ye.

Ye Chong obeyed and withdrew Shang.

Ye Chong and Kui stood on the traveller as it brought them further down along the sloping corridor. On both sides of the traveller were exhibits separated from them by glass. All kinds of weird flora were within these glass chambers. Ye Chong recognized some of them, but not for most of them.

Kui had his head lowered, fully absorbed in whatever he had in mind.

Ye Chong watched the plants passed by in a daze. There were many real life specimens here that he had never seen before, which he recognized only through Lunatic Guan's chip. This was a learning experience for him.

Alchemy was something quite different of all the skills that Ye Chong had picked up. He had not spent much time in it, but instead had relied on Lunatic Guan's auto-analytics mechanism to overcome most of the obstacles he came across. However, he realized that alchemy was a very useful skill, and had always appreciated the opportunity to learn more when it presented itself.

"How many do you recognize?" Kui asked from behind him.

"115," Ye Chong answered without delay. He was always sensitive to numbers, a habit he picked up from Mu.

"115?" Kui sounded surprised. "You know that many?"

Ye Chong replied, "Yes, but I've only seen 52 of them in real life. The other 63 are from a memory chip my teacher gave to me."

"Who's your teacher?" Kui looked agitated.

"Her name is Guan Ling." Ye Chong was surprised that he remembered her name at all. The silhouette of the woman with a wine glass in her hand, leaning lazily against the door frame as her eyes gazed outwards, lost in thought, came to his mind unbidden.

"A beauty, lost at a young age," Shang sighed.

"Guan Ling?" Kui looked like he was trying to recall something, and then it came to him. He looked even more surprised as he said, "Guan Ling ... You mean Guan Ling of May's Night Ridge on Guang Hua?"

Now it was Ye Chong's turn to be surprised. "You know her?"

Kui did not answer him. He was studying Ye Chong closer, not

quite believing it, "You are Guan Ling's student? You truly are Guan Ling' student?"

Ye Chong nodded, "If you mean Guan Ling of May's Night Ridge on Guang Hua, then that's right."

"Wonderful! Wonderful! Haha!" Kui was almost jumping with joy, "Haha, and I was worried you might not have the basics! So you're Guan Ling's student! The Heavens smile upon me, now all my work will not go to waste! Haha!"

Ye Chong could not understand Kui's excitement, and repeated his question, "You know her?"

It took another three minutes before Kui finally calmed down. "I've been to the free space zone when I was younger. That's where I first heard of Guan Ling. She was very famous in the alchemy circle in the free space zone, it's a pity I've never met her in person. I've studied a few of her products. She is truly an amazing alchemist. I was worried that you might not have the basics, but there's nothing to worry about now."

Basics? Did he mean basics in biology? Ye Chong was confused.

"Shang, do you think he'll just give it to me?" Ye Chong asked Shang in his mind.

"Who knows? Sigh, it's not a photo album anyway. People nowadays are losing their creativity, look at the lousy gifts they come up with ..." Shang mumbled in complaint.

Ye Chong realized that he was asking the wrong person.

He asked Kui directly, "What are you offering me?"

Kui paused a bit before laughing, "You're blunt, but I like that!" He then smiled teasingly, "You'll know when you see it."

The traveller moved them forward at an even pace. Ye Chong estimated that they had covered about five kilometers.

Kui was beginning to look pale. His chest was no longer bleeding,

but the skeleton within was exposed. The flesh around his wound was beginning to turn gray.

Kui saw the look Ye Chong was giving him and smiled easily, "Don't worry. The product's reliable, there won't be any accidents. We still have two hours, plenty of time."

Ye Chong was silent. Underneath Kui's easy demeanor was so much regret and dissatisfaction.

Suddenly, Ye Chong thought of something. "How are you related to the incident on Zhou Jian?"

Kui's gaze turned sharp. "How'd you know it is related to us?"

This was the second time Ye Chong saw Kui became alert abruptly. The first time was when he saw Shang. However, he was not afraid. "I was there at Zhou Jian, and saw some of you from Gray Valley."

Kui's gaze softened. His expression was unreadable, but his eyes betrayed the pain he felt in his heart. He recovered soon and said, "That was an accident. A virus accident. A core member of the virus experiment group was isolated from his colleagues. We were too busy with the experiment to notice. By the time I realized, that member had already left and went into hiding. Nobody thought he'd escape Gray Valley to the He Yue Galaxy. We kept looking for him, but to no avail. We heard of the incident soon after it happened, but it was already too late."

Kui whispered in a low voice of this little known secret.

"I see," Ye Chong nodded and said nothing else. What Kui said better matched with what he knew.

He did not do anything to Kui. It was not his place to get involved. Besides, the Research Consortium was almost completely gone by now. The last member, Kui, had only another two hours left to live.

"We're here," Kui said.

They still had to pass through three passcode protected doors to reach their destination.

This was the most peculiar laboratory that Ye Chong had ever seen. There were many mech parts, and all kinds of odd culture containers. Some of them were huge, holding something that was barely visible inside. There were also many other apparatus that he had never seen before.

"This is the Research Consortium's most important and forefront technology," Kui explained solemnly, "I don't know whether it's the right decision to give them all to you, but I don't have much time left, and I have no other choice to make." He looked at Ye Chong and said earnestly, "I believe that you're capable of continuing our work here."

Ye Chong was baffled. He could not understand Kui.

Kui took Ye Chong further into the lab without another word. Ye Chong could feel the reverence the man had for his mission emanating off him.

The further they went in, the more cluttered the place was. Ye Chong's interest deepened. He could see that many of the culture containers had mech parts in them. There were mech mechanical arms, mech mechanical legs ... These mech parts had tissue growing all over them. Some were plant based tissue, and some were muscle flesh.

Kui did not slow down as he went further in. Ye Chong could only set his curiosity aside and followed.

"This lab has been here ever since the Research Consortium was born. The spatial window is also here in this lab. All these years, the Research Consortium has ventured into many fields of research, but no matter if we're talking about spatial technology, machinery or biology, all the best works come from this laboratory. Only the top scientists can enter this lab. It's the dream of every researcher in Gray Valley to step into this place. It is a

symbol of prestige and true capabilities.

"You see how messy the lab is? Can't do anything about it. All of our best research works are here. Anything you see can be highly valuable, so no one dared to touch them. No one has ever figured out what exactly we have here, much less talk about the value of these things. That's how the things start to accumulate over time, ending in up what we see today. Of course, another reason for this was that all the people who made their way in were very busy! No one wanted to waste time cleaning up someone else's mess."

Kui said all of these with a mixture of pride and helplessness. The lab was in such a mess that Ye Chong found it difficult to decide where his next step should be. He could even make out some ancient machinery items, their dull luster telling of the long history behind them.

"Hey, Ye, look's like a treasure trove in here. We have to go through this place thoroughly later! Tsk tsk, leaving them behind in this secluded place is such a waste," Shang's eyes glowed like a miner who saw gold.

Kui was not aware, of course, that a greedy someone was enticing the solemn looking Ye Chong right at that moment.

"In some ways, the Research Consortium is over," Kui sounded devastated, "but I wouldn't want these things to be forgotten just like us. They are the result of hard work from so many people. It'll be truly regretful if they vanish from the face of the universe just like that. I'm not a researcher myself, but I can understand this at least.

"You are a hero. Haha, perhaps you don't think it suits you, but that's how I think it is. It's not too bad, losing to you. Of course, it helps that you're not from one of the Three Aristocratic Families. More importantly, I have no choice! Haha!" Kui laughed heartily, and Ye Chong could sense no sadness behind it.

"This base is yours. Take your time to explore around, find

anything that interests you. I believe that there are many things that you will find curious and exciting. I had wanted to pass over to you the Research Consortium's allies. After all, the people may be gone, but the Consortium can still live on. However, forget about that. Those people are all mediocre but ambitious fools. When I heard you talking about what they had done, do you know what I felt?" Kui turned to look at Ye Chong.

"What?"

"Humiliated! Furious!" Kui's eyes glowed in anger as he spoke through gritted teeth, "Those useless b*stards! They're smearing the name of the Consortium! Arrogant fools, all of them. And when danger strikes, when their strength is needed, they all refused to step up. Cowards! They are the Consortium's greatest embarrassment! Their actions are unforgivable!"

Kui waved his arms around as he growled with intensity.

Ye Chong watched Kui in his emotional state without a word. The Research Consortium's members were useless, that was true. He knew that the Consortium would forever lose the confidence of the people, and never recover their former glory.

Half a minute later, Kui finally calmed down. "Those untrained civilians could win against the red-tailed beasts when they're with you. You're stronger than me in this. If that's the case, I'll be at peace knowing that everything is given to you. I know that, with everything in here, you will rise so much faster. Leave the useless failures to themselves."

Kui suddenly frowned then, "Let's move faster, I don't have much time left."

The two of them quickened their pace, and soon reached a very large culture tank.

The container tank was about 15 meters tall and 10 meters wide. Inside was a murky solution, where a large humanoid shaped

figure of about 10 meters tall was submerged in. The culture tank was connected to many colorful tubes outside. The tubes were connected to the tank on one end and other devices on the other end.

Kui looked up at the tank, speaking as though in a trance, "You see that? That's the result of our latest research."

"What is it?" Ye Chong was a little taken aback.

"A mech!" Kui smiled mischievously, then turned around to make adjustments on the apparatus around them.

"It's not fully formed yet? Sigh, there's not enough time," Kui muttered to himself as he studied the apparatus. His hands moved quickly as he worked.

The solution inside the culture tank drained away rapidly. Through the transparent walls of the tank, Ye Chong finally had a good look at what was inside.

This was not a mech, this was a human!

A 10 meter tall person! The face had strong angled contours, an aquiline nose, thick lips and dark eyebrows. The eyes were tightly closed. It was like a strong and huge giant.

There was a very archaic looking black helmet worn on its head, with a tall red feather rising up tall from the helmet. The body was covered with a layer of form fitting black colored armor, which made it look like the God of Death came from hell himself. Its wrists, elbows, waist and knees were decorated with a bright red flower. This did not tone down the intensity of the humanoid's appearance, but made it look even more enigmatic and treacherous.

Was this really a mech? Ye Chong was deeply shaken.

"What's your choice of weaponry?" Kui observed Ye Chong's expression, pleased with himself. "Originally, we wanted to make it an armor of gold and bright red, which suits our style more.

However, we later find that the black colored alloy improves the physical properties of the armor a lot more, and made the armor more compatible with biological substrates. That's how the black colored alloy came to stay. However, since pure black is the Ye Family's signature appearance, we decided to add these Hell Blossoms. These represent death and chaos."

"We prepared an array of weapons for the mech. Heh, those fellows just do what they want. Look at that, almost all of those are its weapons. Someone even made it a weapons backpack, which can hold around six weapons at a time.

"It's the beginning of a new age! It's a bio-mech! First of its kind in the universe! Three generations have worked on this project, culminating into our success today! We started out with plant based matter since its structure is simpler, but we gave that up later for more advanced life forms. This mech is the one we've been working on. The skeleton is made of metals with the best physical properties. We then grow muscle tissue over the skeleton using culture growing techniques. The bio-mech is more flexible than mechanical mechs. Its fingers are almost identical to a human's. The skeleton frame is not exactly like a human's, as we have improved upon it in many ways. Based on well-established principles in mechanical mechs, we produced an original skeleton frame design that preserves the agility of the human form while improving its structural integrity. The muscle tissue is modified with a virus, giving it 30 times the strength of normal alloys, and 5.52 times the flexibility of human muscle tissue."

Ye Chong listened to the shocking figures in a daze. Even Shang was rendered speechless.

"Information relay is via neurons, much faster and accurate compared to photon circuits. The neurons are connected to the mech's bio-photon processor. This bio-photon processor is the only one that we made successfully. It's powerful, and you'll exactly know how powerful it is once you try it out. Besides, even though

it's a powerful photon processor, it does not result in a PSI." Kui took a glance at Ye Chong.

"The armor is grown with muscle tissue, which greatly enhances its defensive functionality. Its holographic scanning system, comms system and all that are the latest from the Research Consortium. Many of them are just fresh out from the lab oven. This mech is the essence of the Research Consortium's most advanced skills and knowledge.

"It can go up to Mach 30! Compared to the Three Aces from the Three Aristocratic Families, it doesn't differ by a lot! This bio-mech may not be the fastest mech in existence, but its power for short ranged movements has no equal! This is attributed to the unique muscle tissue of the bio-mech. Unlike mechanical mechs that mimic life, this bio-mech is the real thing. It moves like a real life animal, the king of close range combat!

"You may not know this, but the Research Consortium spent almost a third of its research budget on this project. The schematics and design for the bio-mech has been modified for no less than three dozen times. Its every muscle tissue, every armor piece, every piece of skeleton, was the highest achievement of the Research Consortium.

"Its name is – Celest!"

Chapter 513: Unexpected Profit III

Celest had shocked Ye Chong beyond words. It basically overturned everything he believed in about mechs. This mech was new territory.

"Cough cough!" Abruptly, Kui coughed violently, and brought Ye Chong back to the present. He turned to see Kui's chest rising and falling rapidly, his face reddening quickly.

"It's time," Kui smiled at Ye Chong, returning his gaze.

For some reason, Ye Chong felt deeply sorrow for the man. He watched quietly, not knowing what to say.

Kui's expression turned solemn and he spoke, ignoring his condition, "Celest is not invincible, though. There isn't enough time, and it's not quite completed yet. Take off the armor on its leg and have a look."

Ye Chong did as told, and saw exposed metallic structure underneath the black armor. The metal structure was half covered by muscle tissue, but the other half was exposed and shining with a typical metallic glimmer.

"According to the schedule, Celest needs another 15 days to complete. However, I don't have much time left, I can't see it completed." Kui looked at Celest with an unreadable expression. He was equal parts dismayed, regretful, proud and hopeful.

"Take it," Kui smiled at Ye Chong, "Celest is yours, our legacy will live on. You must take care of it, the leg will be its weakest spot. Moreover, maintenance work on Celest will be tricky. You have to study enough biology to know how to do it, or the bio-mech will be useless if it's too heavily damaged. Don't worry about minor scratches since it can heal itself, much like actual living organisms."

"Thank you!" Ye Chong bowed to Kui respectfully.

Kui waved away his gesture, "Don't worry about it. Take care of the mech, and unleash its true potential. And, if you're interested, expand on our work. I will be eternally grateful."

"I will," Ye Chong said. His voice was soft but resolute.

Kui smiled, satisfied. He took out three memory chips and a ring from some hidden corner. "These three chips contain the bulk of the Consortium's research work in three different stages across time. The chips are made of special biological material and have a large memory space. They can only be read with a bio-mech, Celest's bio-photon processor. Haha, all the mechs out there are fakes, to confuse outsiders. This is Celest's dimension keystone. Take it. But first, you have to enter Celest and activate it. Take anything in here that catches your eyes.

"Look," Kui pointed towards the mainframe computer in the lab, "All the information is there. You can check it out yourself. This ring unlocks the information."

Celest's dimension keystone was a simple metal ring. Ye Chong put it on his finger, and the ring tightened immediately like a life animal, latching on to his finger. He could not take it off now.

"The dimension keystone has other features. A lot of our work on spatial science is incorporated into this dimension keystone. You'll find out more when you try it out yourself." Kui was pale as a sheet by now.

"Cough," he coughed out a mouthful of blood.

"It's time," Kui smiled wanly, "I'm so lucky to have met you.

"Live well." Suddenly, Kui fell backwards.

Ye Chong was surprised, and quickly stepped forward to catch him.

Ku had stopped breathing. Ye Chong felt something slippery in his hands. He looked down and found that Kui was already bleeding everywhere. His skin was cracking all over into many tiny

slits, where blood began to flow out.

Kui's pulse and breathing stopped.

Ye Chong put him down. Right after that, the man's body immediately burst open like a balloon. His bone and flesh exploded into a mess.

The blue poison was strong, that was for sure. Ye Chong looked at Celest. The bio-mech stood with its eyes closed, like a magnificent warrior. He looked back at Kui's ruined corpse and felt sorrow for him.

The joy of obtaining Celest was dampened by Kui's death. However, Ye Chong recovered quickly, and began to inspect the bio-mech.

The more he looked, the more surprised he was.

He realized then that the Research Consortium was at the forefront of biological sciences.

Celest's pilot cabin was at its chest. Unlike the metallic pilot cabin in normal mechs, Celest had a pilot cabin made of organic material. There were modified plant substrates and compound materials used everywhere in there. The pilot cabin's oxygen supply system was unique. A kind of plant that Ye Chong had never seen before made up its main structure. It could produce large amounts of oxygen, maintaining the balance of air composition in the pilot cabin. The insides of the pilot cabin were covered with these green plants. They exuded a nice, faint scent that was refreshing.

The most interesting part of the mech was its bio-photon processor.

It looked nothing like any of the photon processors that Ye Chong had seen before. The object was a semi-transparent hemisphere, suspended on top of the main control console, made of some unknown material. It was soft like taffy, and malleable as

well. For example, it could stretch out into a thin, flat disc to display images.

If a memory chip was put on top of it, the photon processor would engulf the chip and display the information within.

Aside from the usual controls, the photon processor can be accessed directly via brain waves. Placed beside the pilot's seat was a helmet. Through it, the pilot can communicate directly with the photon processor and even control the mech through the helmet.

However, this novel method of using brain waves required the mech pilot to be mentally well trained. Ye Chong felt that a mentalist would be able to better make use of this bio-mech. He himself had no talent in skills of the mental sort.

The weapons were just staggering.

He felt like he was looking at a weapons exhibition. There were all sorts of them, from archaic weapons to modern laser based weapons. There were too many for the mind to absorb. The weapons were mostly in black and red. It seemed that the researchers had put in a lot of effort to make the weapons look matching with Celest. Many of the weapons were either carefully polished or decorated with patterns, mostly out of aesthetics. Longer weapons like the archaic lance and spears were either foldable or could be easily disassembled.

Ye Chong also saw the weapons box that Kui mentioned. It looked like a black colored emergency medical box. On top of the box was a large, red flower. The weapons box had an auto latch that could be secured to a slot on Celest's back. The pack itself could store up to six weapons. When in combat, the weapons could be accessed from the sides of the box, making it very handy.

He picked a black colored lance of archaic design, a dark red colored alloy sword, a diamond shaped shield, a laser cutter, 20 auto lock-on shurikens, and a small sized egg-shaped light grenade launcher.

There was a slot on Celest's wrist, which could hold two parrying spears. Han Jia's daggers were taken, while Celest's original daggers were left behind.

Shang also had a huge makeover. The G-Z was relinquished in exchange for a high accuracy sniper rifle, Pierce. Shang commended its shooting accuracy and impressive rate of fire.

Celest also had a cutting edge engine. It was suitable for both short bursts and long distance flight. The only thing Ye Chong thought regretful was the fact that the engine ran on conventional energy sources.

This was not a big problem. Ye Cong had a few teardrop mineralites on him still. Just one would be enough to solve his problem. Ye Chong had wanted to modify Shang's energy source as well so that he could run on teardrop mineralite. Shang's body structure was unique, and any modifications would require all kinds of equipment. That was an issue that he could not solve before. However, here he was now, in the most advanced laboratory of the Research Consortium. What more could he want?

Han Jia was heavily damage. The mech already had many tiny cracks on its structure in the beginning. After that intense battle in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, it was now close to breaking down. Ye Chong thought that Celest was an impressive mech, but Han Jia was still easier to use. However, upon closer inspection with the equipment around him, Ye Chong found that the mech was now beyond saving. It was not only the exterior that was damaged. The mech's internal parts, such as the engine, were also showing many cracks that he could not hope to repair.

Ye Chong was surprised to find Han Jia so heavily damaged. He knew that the mech was in bad shape, but the severity of it left him taken aback. He had been flying in a mech that could have broken down at any moment. The thought left him with a chill down his spine.

Han Jia was the mech that he had used the longest. All these years, he and the mech had conquered powerful foes here and there. However, it was now time to retire it. Ye Chong suddenly thought of Kui. If Han Jia had a conscious mind, it would probably count itself luckier than Kui.

When Ye Chong realized what he was thinking, he was surprised that such a bizarre idea came to his mind.

He took out the teardrop mineralite in Han Jia. The teardrop mineralite was truly the pinnacle of all energy sources. It remained largely unchanged after such long usage.

Now, Ye Chong faced his next obstacle.

Celest's unique structure presented a challenge. Ye Chong knew little about the bio-mech, much less how to modify its engine to use teardrop mineralite.

He recalled then the bio-photon processor in the pilot cabin.

"Perhaps it's worth a shot," Ye Chong thought to himself. Celest's pilot cabin was at the mech's chest, where the armor was thickest. Ye Chong slipped into the pilot cabin and approached the photon processor. It looked like liquid metal, or a chewy candy. Ye Chong found the photon processor's appearance odd.

Ye Chong held the teardrop mineralite in his hand for a moment, hesitated, then finally placed the mineral on top of the bio-photon processor.

The bio-photon processor engulfed the teardrop mineralite quickly, like a slug eating its meal.

Crack crack crack! There was a series of faint noises. The bio-photon processor glowed suddenly in a rainbow of colors.

"Structure evolution commencing," Ye Chong heard a cold voice spoke.

"Skeleton fortification complete!"

"Structural fortification complete!"

...

The cold voice spoke again and again from the bio-photon processor. The pilot cabin was changing rapidly. The green plants growing along the walls turned a brighter green. The controls altered into a more comfortable texture. The bio-photon processor itself changed the most, the semi-transparent glob now a fully transparent crystalline hemisphere.

Ye Chong still had a shred of calmness left in him. He spoke to the voice, "Commence full inspection of the mech's structure immediately." He needed to have at least a general understand of Celest as soon as possible.

The bio-photon processor replied sternly to Ye Chong's order, "Commencing."

When Ye Chong saw the numbers displayed on the bio-photon processor, now changed into a holographic screen, he was shocked once again.

The teardrop mineralite had been moved to the engine. The original energy storage space was no longer there, having been rendered obsolete by the bio-photon processor in favor of the teardrop mineralite, and therefore relinquished. Celest's incomplete leg grew new tissue quickly, triggered by the vast energy source it received. The bio-mech was now fully completed. Its muscles and the external metal armor fit into each other seamlessly, providing a whole new level of defense.

The original muscle tissue was also triggered to evolve by the teardrop mineralite. Under the bio-photon processor's assessment and modification, Celest's body structure was now enhanced.

Since the armor was also able to absorb energy, it now shined in a polished jet black, like molten black metal.

After some calculations, the bio-photon processor found that the

remaining energy in the teardrop mineralite was enough to for Celest to fly for another 62 years. This meant that Ye Chong did not have to worry about its energy source for a long time to come.

It was a pity that there was not enough space around him right now. He would have liked to test the mech.

After that interesting series of changes, Ye Chong did not do anything more to Celest. He had not figured out what happened just now. Celest was a mystery to him. This was new territory to explore. What he did just now was just a lucky guess. He would not try it again.

Shang's modification works were also progressing rapidly. The lab was well equipped, offering advanced machinery that would never be found outside. Shang would have been able to fix his arm had there been enough coraplatinum. Unfortunately, the rare metal was not found in the Consortium's inventory.

Ye Chong regretted it very much. Fixing Shang was his greatest dream. He thought of the huge mass of coraplatinum in the sunken starship in the free space zone, and felt like jumping straight into the sea to get it.

However, even escaping Gray Valley was a problem for him now.

Ye Chong quickly composed himself once more and began to search the lab with Shang.

Arwa's fleet had entered the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. Arwa was not the only one who had been into the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. Mech pilots from Gray Valley and the He Yue Galaxy would often brave the journey in their younger days. This risky endeavor offered them combat experience, allowing them to improve faster. More importantly, they would do anything to get the money to fund their journey, be it in mech repairs or buying more advanced mechs. Many of the mech pilots came from a poor background,

and had to work dearly for their dreams.

The Calamitous Asteroid Belt was deadly. Almost every mech pilot would hear the same story from their seniors. Nonetheless, many were brave enough to enter the place. Mech pilots would enter either solo or in groups, but they would usually keep near the edges of the asteroid region.

Their mechs were not like Ye Chong's, equipped with almost infinite energy. Hence, they had to stay near the edges. Starships were still the default choice for long distance space travel. No mech can achieve long distance space travelling without a starship.

However, no one had ever heard of a starship entering the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. That would be suicidal! Rocks were flying everywhere in the asteroid belt, enough to destroy even the strongest hulls. With the massive structure of a starship, avoiding the rocks would be impossible. That was what made the journey dangerous.

Entering the asteroid belt with a starship fleet was even more unimaginable.

However, in just a short space of time, two starship fleets had already entered the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

No one knew if Sir Jay's fleet survived the journey, but now Arwa's fleet was already following his footsteps.

Arwa's experience was not enough to guide him in this journey. He would need his wisdom and trust from his people.

Like Ye Chong, Arwa was not short of followers. The young genius tactician was a hero of the common people. He was widely respected in Gray Valley, especially amongst the middle lower class. Countless young people viewed him as their role model.

Before Jay appeared, Arwa was the most famous young man in Gray Valley. However, Jay's appearance had robbed him of the people's attention. Now, the only person who could be on the same

level as Jay was Arwa.

Arwa approved of Jay's assessment of their situation, and later facts came to prove his judgment. His fleet members trusted him even more after that. They called him and Jay as the Twin Stars of Gray Valley. People commended him and Jay, calling them Gray Valley's last hope.

In fact, there were also many people who disagreed with this sentiment, especially Arwa's supporters. They thought that Jay was a genius in truth, but still lacking compared to the experienced Arwa.

Whenever his subordinates vented their frustrations about this, Arwa only smiled.

He knew exactly how strong Jay was! He was a truly formidable opponent. In fact, he believed deep down that of the two of them, Jay was probably more likely to bring everyone to victory.

This was a humbling thought. Arwa was a generous man who thought little of fame and self-interest. However, underneath it all was a sense of pride that few knew about.

This was their first day in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. So far, the fleet progressed slowly and smoothly. No one slacked, however. They all knew that this was just the beginning.

As expected, they faced tremendous pressure on the second day. This was apparent from the casualties they suffered.

Arwa remained calm. Underneath his amiable appearance was a resolute heart. Whenever Xiao Wan watched his not-quite-handsome profile, she would feel a touch sentimental. The man was much wiser beyond his age.

Arwa knew that his fleet had a strong advantage that Jay's fleet lacked.

They had long range weapons.

Jay's fleet had almost no long range weapons. While this allowed him to face the red-tailed beasts more easily, it would render them powerless in the asteroid belt. Arwa's fleet had long range weapons, powerful ones, and this made their journey in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt much easier.

Only large rocks could damage the ship's hull, and their weapons allowed them to destroy these large rocks before they hit.

However, the threat of the Calamitous Asteroid Belt was far more severe than Arwa and his fleet mates could have imagined.

They were not aware of how Jay's fleet had pushed their way through the rocks, creating stronger currents of asteroids in the place that were far more dangerous than before.

It was only on the third day that they came to realize this mistake.

Chapter 514: What Happened?

Their fleet travelled along the edge of a huge asteroid whirlpool. Arwa had noticed it fast enough, then ordered the fleet to react in the nick of time for them to escape the pull of the massive whirlpool. Nevertheless, the incident had cost Arwa 62 starships.

It all happened in just under 10 minutes.

An even more pressing issue for them was to avoid the whirlpool by going around it. This extended their three-day journey to five.

No one knew how much these two extra days would cost them. All of them, Arwa included, were grateful for their narrow escape.

They suffered heavy casualties on the third day, when the rocks around them were too dense for their weapons to handle. The asteroids breached their safety parameter and crashed onto the starships. Arwa had not fortified the ship hulls, and this oversight costed him dearly.

The seemingly tough hulls of the starships crumbled easily under the impact of the asteroids.

Arwa's heart ached as the starships exploded, one after another. Each starship carried a few hundred people in them!

His face turned paler and paler. Xiao Wan watched and sympathized with him, but she could not say nothing to console him. There was nothing she could do about their situation.

No one knew that, despite Arwa's pale expression, he was still as determined as ever. He knew that this was the time for them to persevere.

Ye Chong played around with the dimension keystone in his hand. Kui had said that Celest's dimension keystone had other uses.

The dimension keystone was a fine thing. The Research Consortium did not specialize in spatial science, but they had some incredible results. This dimension keystone had incorporated almost everything they knew in spatial science, including the most practical ability of dimension storage. This dimension keystone was the epitome of dimension storage technology.

The Research Consortium had only began to dabble with spatial science when it was the field's golden age in He Yue Galaxy. The Three Aristocratic Families had focused mainly on mech dimension keystone technology, but the Research Consortium chose to study dimension storage.

The Three Aristocratic Families had prospered due to their choice of specialization. The Research Consortium, however, were not rewarded for their efforts in the field. Nevertheless, their dimension storage technology was also one of a kind, like Celest's dimension keystone.

Celest's dimension keystone could be used to store large objects. It was more advanced compared to the dimension keystones designed by the Three Aristocratic Families. In terms of storage, the keystone had its own interesting features. The dimension keystone technology that the Three Aristocratic Families worked on were based on a one-on-one relationship - a dimension keystone can only be linked to one mech.

The Research Consortium's dimension storage technology was based on one-to-many relationships. This meant that the same dimension keystone could be linked to multiple objects, and transfer them into the alternate dimension.

Dimension storage technology was in some sense a very useful mechanism. However, the cost was high, and the new approach meant that they were not able to establish stable one-to-many relationships for dimension storage just yet. Later on, the field matured, resulting in well established dimension storage technologies today. However, the Research Consortium had

missed the opportunity to surpass the Three Aristocratic Families by then.

Ye Chong did not know how much stuff this inconspicuous metal ring could hold.

He found that, the better something was, the more people liked to make them look mediocre.

No one would have guessed that the inconspicuous metal ring was such a priceless treasure.

Ye Chong began to search the lab.

Kui had said that the lab was the center of all research in the Research Consortium since its founding. This place was home to the best products of every generation of Consortium members. Ye Chong translated that to mean that everything in the lab was gold.

He started out by picking them out slowly, but in the end found that there were too many things here, and he did not recognize most of them. The ring on his finger did not so much as beeped, like it was a black hole. He decided then to just store everything away into the ring. He did not know how many things he had taken in the end, much less what they were.

However, there was one thing he could be sure of - they were all good stuff.

He even took away all the equipment in the lab.

He also threw away his bag and put his belongings into the ring. It was safer that way, after all.

Ye Chong was like a locust plague, scouring the place clean. The lab was huge, and despite moving quickly, it still took him awhile to clear all the things inside. These were things accumulated over hundreds of years by the Research Consortium! Later, Ye Chong worked almost mechanically. Where at first he would be pleasantly surprised when he recognized something useful, he now worked without thinking.

He stopped abruptly, and looked in front of him.

There was a black circle floating not far ahead of him. He had reached a corner of the lab without knowing it.

The black circle was almost identical to the one he had seen before. The first two times he saw the black circle, unpleasant things followed. In the first time, he nearly died in the underground cave of an attack, and the second time he had saw a red-tailed beast appeared.

He recalled what Kui had said. They had first found teardrop mineralite and an unstable spatial window right here.

Could this be the unstable spatial window?

Ye Chong knew nothing of spatial science. He did not even know what a spatial window was. His mind was filled with questions.

What was beyond the spatial window?

The black circle hovered eerily in the lab.

Ye Chong decided to circle around the black circle. Who knew if it was dangerous!

Best to be careful.

Ye Chong wanted to go around the black circle because he saw more things in the corner. He wanted to keep those things in his ring too. The circle looked eerie, but Ye Chong thought he should be safe if he left it alone. After all, the circle had been here for years. If it was dangerous, the Research Consortium would have put safety measures in place.

Ye Chong walked around the black circle without incident.

He looked down and began to go through the items in the corner. It was a secluded corner, the things there were already gathering a thick layer of dust, a sharp contrast to the sparkling clean outlook of the other parts of the lab. This was curious. He did not pull all the things into his ring right away, but crouched down to inspect

them instead.

At that moment, unbeknownst to him, the black circle behind him began to alter.

The black circle began to expand, then contract, expand, contract ...

It pulsed rhythmically like a human heart without a sound. Ye Chong was absorbed in whatever was in his hands at the moment and did not notice anything amiss behind him. He was surprised at what he found. The object he had in his hands was strange. He had never seen anything like it.

A light blue colored fungus grew on a pink colored colloid object.

The fungus looked weird. It had thin tendrils, like human hair. The tendrils did not lie down, but instead swayed in the air like seaweed in water. Ye Chong did not recognize this organism. Lunatic Guan's chip had no records of anything like it.

Could this be some new species?

Ye Chong carefully brushed away the dust and took the entire rubbery object.

Behind him, the black circle had switched from pulsation to gradual expansion. The two-dimensional black circle now expanded like a balloon towards its surroundings.

Ye Chong put the pink colored colloid and the unknown blue fungus into his ring and stood up.

Suddenly, his vision turned black.

The black circle had swallowed him whole. Immediately after, the darkness began to shrink inwards, growing smaller and smaller.

Right after he finished modifying his engine to run on teardrop mineralite, Shang noticed that he had lost contact with Ye Chong. By then, the black circle was already a black dot in the air. It

exploded in a bright light and disappeared.

Shang gasped, "Ye!" He was out of the modification workshop in an instant.

When he reached the laboratory, it was already empty.

Shang searched like crazy for Ye Chong around the entire base, but there was no sign of him anywhere. Ye Chong had simply vanished into thin air.

Ye Chong only felt his vision darkened. He fainted in the next moment.

When Ye Chong opened his eyes again, he was stunned!

All around him was a large stretch of greenery. This was a forest. The large girth of the trees told him that this was a well preserved primary forest.

How could this be? There was no forest on Spectre! Ye Chong had asked Shang to scan the entire planet before he set foot on Spectre. They found no signs of life on that barren planet.

Now, he found himself in the middle of a dense forest.

What happened? What had happened to him? Ye Chong looked at his hands in disbelief. The ring was still on his finger. The pink colored colloid and blue hairy fungus that he kept at the last minute were also intact.

Ye Chong tried to withdraw Celest.

The bio-mech appeared before Ye Chong. Its tall figure gave Ye Chong a sense of control and security.

Just as he felt the tension eased, he realized abruptly that he had lost contact with Shang. That made him panic. He tried desperately to call to Shang, but got no reply.

About 10 minutes later, he gave up trying. There was no reply

from the mech. He knew that he was separated from Mu and Shang once again.

Ye Chong felt horrible.

It felt worse than the last time. Much, much worse.

How did he come to this place? How did he got separated from Shang? He knew nothing about his situation. He knew nothing, and he had nothing to work with. This made him felt terrible about it, since he did not know how to find Mu and Shang now.

Two hours later, Ye Chong finally picked himself up. It was very rare for Ye Chong to be affected for so long.

He set aside the issue of Mu and Shang. His priority right now was to find out where he was.

He withdrew Celest and climbed into its pilot cabin.

Celest's appearance had changed a lot after taking in the teardrop mineralite. The only thing that remained the same was his solemn face. Ye Chong gave the order for the bio-photon processor to activate its scanning system.

Celest opened its eyes for the first time.

This was a huge forest. Animals were abound. However, Ye Chong did not recognize any of them. He also found that the forest was divided clearly into two regions.

A dark and thick mist separated the forest into two parts - one was full of light, and the other was under the dark shade of the mist.

The dark mist seemed to produce a strong electrical interference. Celest could not probe the dark region.

"Unidentified flying object found," the bio-photon processor announced suddenly.

...

Today was Ban Meng's first day flying. As a beginner who had just passed his test, he could only fly in the beginner class Wood Kite. He was not bothered by it, however, since he could only afford a Wood Kite. His dream was to fly, high up into the sky. As a physically robust but mentally simple fellow, flying was not an easy task.

Ban Meng was strong and muscular. No one would challenge him in a fight. However, he was severely lacking when it came to parapsychic abilities. He would not have had the skills to pilot a Wood Kite without working as hard as he did.

Ban Meng was the lowest end model for beginners. It had the shape of a bird, and was made up of 125 pieces of splitbark wood.

Ban Meng carefully maneuvered the trackball. His parapsychic senses were so weak that he could just barely fly the Wood Kite with the lowest end control device that was the trackball.

When Ban Meng was a kid, he had once saw a some airshow pilots execute all kinds of air performance tricks. Ever since then, Ban Meng began to dream of flying one day.

To fly, he would have to get a flying license. He had not heard of anyone who could fly without the aid of some aircraft. Even the strongest parapsychic could not do that. However, when little Ban Meng found a dream for himself, he was told that he had no talent in parapsychic abilities.

His own history proved that beyond doubt. He was physically strong, much stronger than his peers. However, he had no talent whatsoever in parapsychic abilities. Even though little Ban Meng was simple minded, he was also very stubborn. Fortunately, his family was able, not too poor, and could accept his chosen direction in life.

In school, Ban Meng was teased by his classmates. It was simply too funny to see a 17-year-old only just cleared to fly a Wood Kite!

All the aircrafts operated on the same principle - the pilot flies their vessel with a trackball. Usually, a qualified pilot would have to satisfy two requirements. Firstly, the pilot must be skillful enough in parapsychic control and aircraft maneuvering. Secondly, the pilot's physical condition must be able to withstand the act of flying. Ban Meng had no trouble with the second requirement. He was strong as a horse. Even his teachers advised him to switch to combat class.

It was the pilot's parapsychic strength that controlled the trackball. This was Ban Meng's greatest weakness. Despite all the effort he put in, he did not have enough inborn talent. If anything, he had only upgraded himself from a weak afterglow to a tiny candle in a huge room.

Nonetheless, he did not give up. His teachers sympathized with him and were often lenient. It was simply unfortunate that parapsychic ability was an innate talent that could hardly be improved by one's efforts.

Little by little, Ban Meng labored his way to success, as he finally earned the license to fly a Wood Kite.

The Wood Kite wobbled as it flew. Ban Meng was in its pilot cabin, tensed all over. He was focused entirely on controlling the trackball. He knew that he was already way off course.

...

Ye Chong saw the odd aircraft. It looked like it was made of some kind of wood, which was weird. Such a primitive aircraft can only be found in museums where he came from. The gray colored wooden panels formed the aircraft. Ye Chong thought it was strange since the wooden structure looked terribly unsafe to fly in.

A wooden structure could not withstand high speed flight, since it had very low endurance.

Ye Chong also found it odd that, while the aircraft was not

moving very quickly, it was already stretching the limits of the wooden structure.

Ye Chong considered the aircraft for a moment, and decided to bring it down first.

Zing!

An auto lock-on shuriken shot out of Celest's weapons pack and flew straight towards the large wooden bird.

Bullseye.

There was a loud sound of impact.

The wooden bird disintegrated into pieces midair. Next, Ye Chong saw a man in the middle of the wooden scraps, free falling and screaming for his life.

Zing! Another shuriken spinned its way towards the man.

...

Ban Meng was completely caught off guard by the attack. He did not know why his Wood Kite suddenly went into pieces in the air. Was he cheated by the aircraft trader? He was furious by the thought!

However, he was swallowed in panic in the next moment. He felt himself falling and began to scream without knowing it. The wind bellowed loudly in his ears. He could not hear anything else. There was only one thought on his mind - he's dead! He was going to die!

Just when all hope seemed lost, he felt a force on his neck, like something was pulling him backwards!

Wham! There was a low rumble, and he felt all the wind forced out of his chest.

Bang! There was pain on his back. He had hit on a tree branch.

Before he could scream again, another strong force gripped on his shirt, suffocating him. His body shook, and his fall was stopped

forcefully.

The entire incident caught him off guard. He was only an ordinary 17 year old teenager, untrained for situations like these. He was still confused about what had happened to him.

When he gathered himself, he found himself hanging high up in the air.

He was more than a dozen meters above the ground. The discovery scared the life out of him. He could not help but prayed, "Dear God, please help me!"

Fortunately, his position seemed to be relatively stable, and that comforted him. Now more in control of himself, Ban Meng decided to try to get himself down to the ground as soon as possible. Falling down from this height would definitely kill him!

He looked down again and noticed that somewhere down there, a black haired man was studying the broken wooden parts of his Wood Kite.

"What's so interesting about a Wood Kite?" Ban Meng thought to himself.

Chapter 515: Ban Meng

"Huh, that's not right, maybe this person saved me?" Ban Meng realized then that he did not know how he came to stop falling. He looked behind him and was shocked by what he found.

A huge, black colored nail or something had pinned him onto a tree through his clothing.

Ban Meng swallowed with difficulty. He felt a chill running down his neck. If the black object had been off course by an inch, his head would have been gone.

Perhaps this person had really saved him. Ban Meng considered it for a moment. He may look like a brute, but he was capable of being reflective.

...

Ye Chong studied the broken wooden parts of the wooden bird thing. He was surprised, having never seen any aircraft like this one. The gray colored wood felt light in his hand, but they were tough material. He knew this from their pieces on the ground. The parts may all be disassembled, but each wooden part was still undamaged.

This, to Ye Chong, was incomprehensible. Ye Chong had used his first shuriken in attack mode. It was a powerful weapon, capable of tearing through normal mechs. Even advanced mechs would not be left unscathed.

This wooden bird, however, still had all its wooden pieces intact despite losing its structure. The material was strong, that much was clear.

Ye Chong tried to bend one of the wooden boards with his hands.

...

Ban Meng saw something he had never seen before. The man

down below was bending a five-centimeter thick splitbark wood into a semi-circular arch with ease.

How - how was that possible?

Ban Meng stared with bulging eyes, speechless. He had never heard of anyone capable of doing that. He could almost hear the sharp creaking sound from the bent splitbark wood.

This was too scary! Was this man from the wild or something?

Crack! The splitbark wood in the man's hands broke into two.

Ban Mang stared at the man below like he was a monster. He had no words to describe what he was seeing!

...

Ye Chong frowned. The wood was hard! Harder than normal alloy, in fact. No wonder it was used to build the aircraft. The material was strong enough. Ye Chong knew exactly how strong he can be. His force just now would have broken an average alloy panel into pieces.

The gray colored wood in his hands had broken into two, the edges in an almost uniform zigzag line.

"This is a suitable material to build a mech," Ye Chong thought to himself. It was strong enough, and more importantly, it was lighter than skeletons. A mech that was built from this material would be very powerful.

On the other hand, he did not know about the other properties of this wooden material. He would need specialized equipment to study it. Physical properties of the material were only the beginning in the list of things to check before deciding if it was suitable for mechs.

Suddenly, Ye Chong saw a spherical object amidst the heap of wooden material.

Huh? What was that?

It looked a lot like the bio-photon processor in Celest's pilot cabin, although the latter was more transparent. Ye Chong picked up the object and immediately noticed another difference. The bio-photon processor was fluid, almost like liquid, but this semi-transparent ball was hard, like a kind of mineral.

"What's this?" Ye Chong lifted the round object in his hand and looked up at Ban Meng.

Ban Meng answered reflexively, "A trackball!"

He suddenly realized that the man was actually looking at him, so he cried out, "My hero, please let me down!" He smiled in a flattering manner. This man he was dealing with was definitely no ordinary person. He was probably a sharpshooter. Ban Meng had heard that experts usually behave weirdly. He did not want to be on the wrong side of this man.

Hero? Ye Chong suddenly thought of Kui. Kui had called him that. However, the man with a big heart had already returned to the ashes, full of regret and dissatisfaction.

The thought reminded him of his being separated from Mu and Shang, and that squashed whatever curiosity he was feeling right then.

Ban Meng suddenly felt some movement from his shirt. He looked back and was shocked! The black nail thing was moving like an animal, trying to get itself out of the tree.

"Aaaahh - !" Ban Meng shrieked with his piercing voice. The black nail thing released itself from the tree. Ban Meng felt the pull from behind him loosen, and then began to fall.

Ye Chong took a glance at the screaming Ban meng and caught him easily.

Ban Meng had his eyes shut and was still screaming shrilly. It was such a sharp voice that even Ye Chong could not handle it. He pushed, and Ban Meng was flung away like a sandbag, his scream

following him.

Ye Chong focused back on the semi-transparent ball in his hand. What was this trackball thing for? Ye Chong could not figure it out.

Ban Meng finally found solid ground directly under his feet, even though it was a puddle of mud. He stopped screaming and stole a careful glance at the man. He must be very strong, to throw him away so easily. It would take an expert to do that.

"What is the trackball for?" Ye Chong asked simply without looking at Ban Meng, but his tone demanded compliance.

"To control the Wood Kite," Ban Mang answered carefully. "Are you testing me? You're testing me with common knowledge? You think I'm retarded?" Ban Meng thought with reproach.

"So it's called Wood Kite," Ye Chong thought to himself. More questions came to him - how was this trackball used to control the aircraft. Was it a new kind of photon processor?

Ye Chong could not understand it at all. It seemed that he would have to rely on the young man before him.

"What's your name?"

"Ban Meng," Ban Meng replied. He had never thought of himself as timid, but whenever he looked into the man's eyes, he would shudder involuntarily.

"Where is this?" Ye Chong looked around him, a completely unfamiliar place to him. He knew nothing about this place. This was definitely not somewhere he had been before.

"It's Duality Forest, of course," Ban Meng said with a pout.

"Duality Forest?" Ye Chong searched his memory, but could not find anything close to it. Through Celest, he had seen how the forest was divided into two by a dark mist. That must be where the name came from.

"Where's the nearest city?" Ye Chong asked. If he could find the nearest city, he would be able to find out his exact location. All his problems would be solved then.

"Yedda," Ban Mang answered cautiously.

Ye Chong frowned. Another city he had never heard of. He had a bad feeling about this.

Seeing Ye Chong frowning made Ban Meng's heart skipped a beat.

"You, lead the way," Ye Chong pulled Ban Meng up and said. Ban Meng was lost. He did not know what to do next.

"Directions, now," Ye Chong said without expression.

Ban Meng felt his heart skipped another beat. He quickly said, "To the west, just go straight to the west, cross a river, and you'll arrive at the city."

Ye Chong withdrew Celest, which was hidden somewhere out of view. He then pulled Ban Meng along and began to run.

"Waah!" Ban Meng's piercing scream started again. Birds flew out from the treetops, startled.

Ban Meng saw the trees went past him in a breeze. The headwind was strong enough to keep his eyes from opening comfortably. He was utterly shocked!

Fast! They were too fast!

He shuddered. How could any human move so fast? This was faster than him in his Wood Kite. Moreover, the man leaping from tree to tree so deftly that it was just hard to believe.

Ban Meng could not describe his feelings right then. His mind drew a blank. Ye Chong carried him by the waist, so he was facing downwards. The ground drew close and retreated repeatedly as they advanced.

After a short while, he was beginning to feel nauseous, so he shut

his eyes.

Gradually, he calmed down. He realized that the man was not actually aggressive. At the very least, he did not hurt him.

"Is it this one?"

Ban Meng opened his eyes and saw a huge river. It was about a hundred meters wide. The current was strong, bringing up waves on the banks. The river was lined with trees, and the shore was made up of weathered oval stones.

Ban Meng stared in disbelief. How was this possible? How were they already here at Raging Waters?

In Wood Kite, he would need at least two hours to reach this river. How did this man arrive here in half an hour? Was he using an aircraft?

Ban Meng's eyes instinctively went to Ye Chong's legs, and saw only a pair of daggers.

He looked back up at Ye Chong. The man's face was still devoid of expression, as though the demanding journey did not affect him at all. Even his breathing was even.

"Is it this one?" Ye Chong looked calmly at Ban Meng and repeated his question.

Ban Meng's eyes met Ye Chong's, and his heart squeezed.

He was about to reply when Ye Chong seemed to notice something, then abruptly threw him to the side.

Ye Chong turned around quickly and looked.

In front of him was a strange animal that he had never seen before. It was the size of a cow, and had two red eyes that gleamed ferociously. Three legs supported its body, and one of it was stepping on a rock. On its head was a curved horn, black with rings of yellow on it. On its back was a tail, covered with spikes.

"A tribos!" Ban Meng cried with a trembling voice.

They were doomed! He never imagined they would encounter a tribos. This was sheer bad luck! Ban Meng felt hopeless. Only a full armed shooter could triumph against this fierce creature. The animal can move very quickly, and no human was a match against it.

The leg of the tribos that was stepping on a rock suddenly pushed, and the animal lunged at the man.

Ban Meng wanted to close his eyes, but he was not fast enough even for that.

What happened next happened so fast that he could not react in time to them.

The man's figure blurred.

Strip! There was a soft but clear sound, like paper shredding.

The man appeared behind the tribos out of nowhere. Ban Meng did not see how he got there, even though his eyes never closed.

Splat! The tribos, which was already in midair during its lunge, fell heavily on the river bank.

The tribos lay on the river bank unmoving, like it was dead. From where Ban Meng was, he could see a thin line of blood on the tribos' neck.

A few seconds later, blood sprayed out of the wound like a burst from a high pressure pipe. The pebbles on the bank were dyed red.

Ban Meng stroked his own neck unconsciously as he watched.

This incident was not even worth mentioning for Ye Chong. The so-called tribos was the typical example of an enemy that was all bark but no bite. Be it in terms of speed, strength or strategy, the creature was far more inferior compared to the red-tailed beast.

He walked to Ban Meng and said, "Where to next?"

So cool! That was so cool! Ban Meng could worship this man like he would a God. He believed that even their own expert shooters

would not be able to kill a tribos so easily when unarmed.

An idol, definitely an idol! Ban Meng could see the halo above the man's head.

Sweep! He felt a strong force moving him, and then he was sent flying.

Splash! He traced an arch in the air and landed in the river. All the fanciful thoughts he had were thrown out the window.

"Waaahh - Save me! There's man-eating fish in here -"

...

They finally reached their destination.

Ye Chong looked up at the strange city before him.

The sky was busy with all kinds of aircrafts flying around. The aircrafts were odd. Even Ye Chong with all his experience with mechs had never seen anything like them. Some of the aircrafts looked like the one Ban Meng was in.

The people in the streets threw suspicious looks at Ye Chong.

Ye Chong was wearing something unusual. He was also carrying Ban Meng, who was drenched and covered with mud and grass. It was hard to go unnoticed like that. Ye Chong looked around him and realized the problem immediately.

"Where's your house?" Ye Chong dumped Ban Meng on the ground.

"My house?" Ban Meng jerked like he was electrocuted. "What're you thinking, man? Look, we don't know each other very well. I answered everything you asked about, I cooperated, and didn't give you any trouble. So why don't you just let me go ..."

Ban Meng was almost crying as he pleaded. Ye Chong's actions informed him that it was in his best interest to cooperate, and that was what he did. He was afraid that Ye Chong would harm his family, so he could only beg for mercy.

"I'll be staying with you for awhile," Ye Chong said, succinct as ever.

"Staying with me?" Ban Meng was surprised. He looked Ye Chong up and down, but found the man looking back without any sense of embarrassment at all. He recalled how strong the man was, and forced down whatever words of rejection he wanted to say.

"How long?" Ban Meng asked carefully. He would not want a troublemaker in his home. Besides, it would be hard to make him leave later.

Ye Chong thought about it for a moment. "Three months."

"Three months!" That was too much for Ban Meng. "No way, bro, my family is poor. Why don't you try asking the rich people? They have more than enough to spare, and with your abilities, I don't think they'll even think of rejecting you ... " Ban Meng was pleased at himself for coming up with that one. He was never one for being smooth with words. Perhaps the day's adventure had triggered something in him.

Ye Chong said nothing. He only raised an eyebrow and eyed Ban Meng's throat for a bit.

Ban Meng felt a chill that ran down to the depth of his soul. Visions of the tribos with its red eyes and bleeding neck came back to him, and he shuddered involuntarily.

Heavens! How could he have forgotten who he was dealing with?

Ban Mang panicked. This was his first time dealing with someone so strong, and did not know what to do now. However, he did not want to bring Ye Chong back to his house. The man spelt danger!

Ban Meng tried to speak up about it, but when he saw the man's eyes turned colder and colder, he blurted out, "No problem! No problem at all!" The moment the words came out, Ban Meng wanted to slap himself.

"Lead the way," Ye Chong said without expression and turned

away, his eyes flashing with a hint of mischief. The truth was, if the young man had really rejected him, Ye Chong would not really kill him. He would make him suffer a bit, though.

Ye Chong suddenly felt like he was one of those antagonists in the movies that Shang told him about. This made him miss Shang again. The mech was annoying like hell, but Ye Chong thought of Mu and Shang like his brothers. No one would hate their own sibling for being annoying.

"I wonder how they're doing?" Ye Chong wondered with a sigh.

Shang had ordered for the entire fleet to land on Spectre. Ye Chong had vanished from the base, so the source of the problem must be around there somewhere. Shang would not leave without getting some answers.

Besides, the underground city had plenty of resources and was well hidden. It was perfect for their hideout.

Shang had also ordered for the remains of the mechs and red-tailed beasts on Spectre to be dealt with. After a sandstorm, all traces of the battle between both sides were gone.

The widely praised fleet led by Jay vanished silently, just like that. People thought that they perished in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

Arwa's fleet survived the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. Although his fleet suffered heavily, it did not stop him from becoming a legend!

Many people requested to join his fleet, and his reputation rose to a whole new level.

He did not know that right after he made the warp jump, a group of people were hidden on the nearby Planet Spectre, watching their every move.

Everyone thought that Jay, a man who could potentially become a legend, had vanished along with his mysterious fleet in the vast expanse of outer space.

Who knew when they would reappear again?

Ban Meng led the way listlessly, ignoring the strange looks he was getting from the people on the streets.

"As long as you cooperate, your family will be safe," Ye Chong said plainly. His abilities backed his words.

Ban Meng jolted in reassurance, but quickly lost his optimism. He cursed inside, "F*ck, my family be safer if you're not around!"

He did not say them out loud, however. He led the way with a slouch.

Ye Chong studied his surroundings with interest. Everything here was new to him. He saw no metals around him. Most of the things were made of wood. As a result, the buildings were not tall. Most of them reached up to three storeys only.

"Why is there no metal here?" Ye Chong asked Ban Meng.

Ban Meng replied offhandedly, "Metal? What's that?"

Ye Chong had nothing to say to that. He considered the problem, and held out his dagger for Ban Meng to see, "Something like this."

"They're heavy!" Ban Meng took the daggers and studied them closely. "This dagger's material is strange, so heavy ..." He put this hand to the sharp edge of the dagger.

Ye Chong wanted to warn him, but he was too late.

A drop of blood bled out from his finger. He hissed. "It's sharp!"

"What is this? Why is it so sharp?" Ban Meng looked more lively now and asked Ye Chong curiously.

"You've never seen it before?" Ye Chong asked.

"No, never," Ban Meng replied with certainty.

Were there really no metals around here? Ye Chong found it incomprehensible. Metals are everywhere. Even Archipelago, the secluded backwater, had metals. How could there be no metals here? Was it because there were no metal ores, or because the people here had not learned how to extract metals from the ores?

Chapter 516: This World Is Too Dangerous

As Ye Chong considered the issue, he saw Ban Mang toying his dagger with great interest. He said calmly, "The dagger, you can have it."

"Really?" Ban Meng was overjoyed.

"Yes." Ye Chong still wore an emotionless expression, but Ban Meng felt like kissing the man. Ye Chong's daggers were not top of the line, but were in fact only extras. Guardian's daggers were first class, but since he had given Guardian to Rui Bing, he could not possibly keep the daggers for himself.

"Then what do you use for cutting here?"

"Laser blades." Ban Meng now had a different impression of Ye Chong. The latter looked like a careless man, but was in fact quite observant. Since he gifted him such a precious item, the man must not mean harm to him, else he would not have offered this unnecessary gesture. After all, their difference in strength was too great. Ban Meng now paid more attention to Ye Chong's questions, but he could not help but wonder - did this man know nothing at all?

"Laser blades? Let me see one."

Ban Meng fished out a block that was about two fingers wide.

Ye Chong took it and studied the thing. His fingers wrapped comfortably around the block, which was probably made of some kind of unknown type of wood. The block was about 10 centimeters long, and a centimeter thick. It was in a light green color, with a hook on one end and a green colored rock near it. On the other end was a red button.

This was a laser sword!

Ye Chong recognized it instantly. The green rock must be the energy source, while the red button would activate the sword. Ye

Chong pressed the red button. As expected, a white colored laser shot out from the other end, long and thin like a sword.

The white laser sword looked solid. The edges of the laser were well defined.

Ye Chong crouched down and traced the laser blade lightly on the ground. He did not feel any resistance in his hand, but the ground already had a deep mark in it.

What a powerful laser sword! Ye Chong's face betrayed nothing, but he was shocked inside.

Laser swords were not exactly high tech stuff. Ye Chong had used them before. Nevertheless, there were technical difficulties with making them, such as controlling the energy channelled into the weapon and the focusing of this energy. The more focused the laser energy was, the clearer the edges of the laser sword. This would result in better and cleaner cutting results.

These technical difficulties had long plagued the improvement of laser swords. Based on what Ye Chong knew, no laser sword could be focused so accurately. This was why most advanced mechs preferred ally swords instead of their laser counterparts.

Besides, when laser swords were used in battle, the materialized laser blade itself could be unstable. However, when Ye Chong tried to cut the ground with the laser blade he had, the blade did not waver at all.

This was a highly advanced laser blade!

"Hey, you two, you're destroying public property. That's a penalty of 30 ao!" An old woman in a red shirt approached them menacingly.

Ye Chong turned and looked at the old lady.

Ban Meng could feel his head explode. Heavens! How could he be so careless? This old lady's going to die! If the man was offended, then ...

Ban Meng could see the bloody aftermath in his head. Blood would color the streets today.

"Whatcha looking at? What? You gonna argue? Lemme tell ya, this grandma's been here on the streets since 30 years ago, hehe, and I've never seen anyone make trouble here! You're too young to mess with me, little boys," the old woman glared at them as she pulled up her sleeves, showing the tattoo of a green dragon on the wrinkled skin of her arms.

F*ck! They're truly f*cked now! Ban Meng lost all hope he had. He knew that the stranger from the woods was not open for negotiations. The tribos was killed like it cost him nothing. How would he stand being scolded like this? The legendary characters of great strength had always killed whenever it pleased them. They treated life like it was worth nothing at all.

If this man started a massacre, his life was over! Heavens, whichever deity was listening, please save him!

"Money, get your money."

Ban Meng kept his eyes shut. He dared not watch. It would turn bloody, for sure.

"Get your money!"

Huh, wasn't that the voice of that cold hearted man? Ban Meng realized, and opened his eyes.

The first thing he saw was Ye Chong tilting his head at him and calmly signalling for him to pay up.

The old woman was still glaring at them. Ban Meng quickly said, "Alright alright alright! Money! Money!" Ban Meng quickly took them out of his wallet.

It was unexpected, really, that the man was actually not as bad as he thought. Ban Meng had heard of how famous experts usually a bad temper and would intimidate the weak.

"Hmph, that's more like it," the old woman snatched the money off Ban Meng's hands and stuffed a penalty ticket into them.

Ye Chong did not seem to be perturbed by the incident. He turned to Ban Meng and said, "Let's go."

Ban Meng stole glances at Ye Chong as they made their way to the former's house. He could not figure out the cold stranger.

The two of them travelled the rest of journey in silence.

"Well, here we are," Ban Meng said in a whisper. It was a three-storey building, with a courtyard about 200 square meters wide.

Ban Meng pushed through the door and announced, "I'm back."

"Meng Meng is back! Why're you back so late today?" A woman's voice asked from inside the house. She came to the door, and turned out to be a beautiful middle aged woman. She wore an apron, with her hair tied up into a high bun. She was surprised to see Ban Meng's sorry state. "What happened? Weren't you flying with your Wood Kite today? How'd you end up like this? Did something go wrong while you're flying?"

"That d*mned store keeper, he sold me a spoiled one, it disassembled while I was in the air!

Ban Meng explained through gritted teeth. He did not know that his Wood Kite was destroyed by the cold man behind him.

"Long as you're okay!" Ban Meng's mother got a small towel to clean his face.

When she was done, she noticed Ye Chong. "This is ..."

"He's a classmate. His parents are outstation, so I asked him to stay with us in the meantime." Ban Meng lied easily with his eyes open. Ye Chong was surprised.

"Aunty," Ye Chong greeted her politely.

"Come in, come in! We'll gladly have you, make yourself at home, don't be shy!" Ban Meng's mother had never seen his strange outfit

before, but she greeted Ye Chong warmly. Ye Chong's expression had changed by then. The lines on his face no longer looked so cold and hard. Instead, his face had softened, and his lanky figure gave the impression of a bookish young man.

Ban Meng stared at Ye Chong in disbelief. He could not understand how the cold stranger could conjure up this image of a meek young man, like he was simply harmless.

Ye Chong ignored the stare he was getting from Ban Meng and followed the latter's mother into the house.

It was hard to discern if the furnishings in the house were of what quality or style, and Ye Chong could only ignore all the unfamiliar things lying around. Now was not the time to investigate them.

He sat quietly like a well behaved young man.

Dinner was sumptuous. Ban Meng's father was always busy with work, so he ate with some haste.

They gave Ye Chong a room of his own.

When it was only him and Ban Meng together upstairs, Ye Chong quickly pulled Ban Meng into his room. It was only then that Ban Meng saw traces of the man who could kill a man, no, kill a tribos, without blinking.

"What do you want?" Ban Meng tried to stay calm.

"I have a question," the meek young man now looked like the cold stranger he first came to know.

"What is it?"

Well, where should he even begin? Ye Chong was troubled. Everything here was unfamiliar to him. He remembered Ban Meng's Wood Kit then, and thought - safety first!

First, he needed to know who or what could pose a threat to him.

"Who's the strongest person here?"

"Strongest? You mean Yedda. Well, let me think, it should be Duo Ka. He's a Level 6 shooter!" Ban Meng said uncertainly after some thought.

"Shooter? What's a shooter?" Ye Chong continued with his questions.

"Heavens, boss, are you from outer space? Don't you know what a shooter is?" Ban Meng shouted unnecessarily loudly. He quickly quieted down at Ye chong's raised eyebrow.

"Err, how do I explain a shooter? Shooters, they have the strongest parapsychic control. They shoot without missing, the strongest warriors in the world," Ban Meng explained the best he could.

Ye Chong had an inkling now. They were long range fighters. It should not be surprising, given how advanced they were in laser tech. Ye Chong frowned at the thought, however. If their laser tech was so advanced, their laser guns must be very powerful. Close range mech pilots dreaded the threat posed by long range mechs and their weapons.

What was parapsychic control, though?

"What is a parapsychic, hmm, how should I put it? If you have parapsychic abilities, you can use it to control aircrafts and even weapons." Ban Meng waved around as he explained, but did not quite explain the concept.

"Demonstrate it for me," Ye Chong said.

Ban Meng blushed at his own incompetence in parapsychic control, and said with difficulty, "My - my parapsychic sense is too weak."

"I see," Ye Chong switched topics, "Do you have weapons here?"

"Weapons?" Ban Meng jolted in surprised. "What are you planning?"

"I want to see them." Ye Chong thought Ban Meng's overreaction was weird.

"I don't even have the lowest level flying license, how can I have any weapons? To own a weapon, you have to obtain at least an intermediate level flying license. Your parapsychic control must also be above Level 4. More powerful weapons will have stricter requirements," Ban Meng explained.

"Where can we get the weapons?" Ye Chong asked.

Ban Meng shook his head. "You don't have a license, people won't even sell them to you."

"I can steal," Ye Chong said easily. He was surprised that weaponry was controlled strictly here. Where he came from, mechs could be bought anywhere and by anyone.

Poor Ban Meng looked pale. He swallowed heavily and said, "You really shouldn't. Every weapons store has a judiciary police station right beside them. The officers are all very strong. Criminals are shot to shreds the moment they come close."

"If that's the case, we'll need to plan accordingly," Ye Chong seemed to consider the possibility.

A madman! Definitely a madman! If this man really went to rob the weapons store, they will be in big trouble! Ban Meng quickly said, "No need to rush! I have a friend with single barrel heatgun, I'll show you tomorrow."

Ye Chong thought about that for a moment, then nodded, "Alright."

"What level is the Wood Kite that you flew today?" Ye Chong thought of something else.

Ban Meng blushed again "The lowest."

Ye Chong nodded, thinking through the facts. The local technology was indeed unique. Even the lowest level aircraft could

only be disassembled by his shuriken attack, and not be blown to bits. Ye Chong did not underestimate the Wood Kite or the laser blade he saw. On the contrary, he treated them cautiously. He did not know what else in this unfamiliar place could threaten him.

Besides, he still did not quite the whole parapsychic thing that Ban Meng talked about.

"Get some rest." Ye Chong's words sounded like a grant of mercy to Ban Meng.

(The next day.)

School, to Ye Chong, was a place that was much easier to understand.

They looked about the same no matter where he went. This particular school was not too big, but Ye Chong could see all kinds of aircrafts here. He could tell from Ban Meng talked about it that this school was only an average one, neither at the top nor at the bottom in ranking.

He also noticed the way many students were giving Ban Meng mocking or condescending looks.

"Do they not like you?" Ye Chong asked.

"Probably," Ban Meng answered with affected casualness.

"Why?"

"No reason, other than the fact that I want to be a pilot despite being weak in parapsychic control." Ban Meng was used to his situation already, but Ye Chong could still make out the disappointment he felt in his voice.

"Why not switch careers? You're more suitable for combat," Ye Chong suggested.

"Combat? What use is there for combat? It's a useless skill," Ban Meng said disapprovingly.

Useless? Ye Chong thought that was a strange assessment.

Combat was not useless. Even in the Five Galaxies where the profession was slowly disappearing, combat experts were still recognized as a treat for mech pilots. He Yue's Ye Family and the Sang Tribe were even famous because of their combat expertise. In the free space zone, combat and alchemy were the two most mainstream professions. This was the first time he had heard of combat being described as useless.

"Who told you that?"

"Everyone in the world knows it. Parapsychic control is the only measure of one's true strength. People without parapsychic control are useless," Ban Meng shook his head and said with confidence, "The weakest student club we have in school is the combat association. Hehe, it has only three members. Anyone from the shooting club can win against all three of them single-handedly."

Ye Chong did not bother to argue for the advantages of combat.

Ye Chong followed Ban Meng into his class, and Ban Meng could only go with the flow. The cold man would not follow his advice just yet. Ban Meng's classmates saw him bring a stranger into class, and threw him looks of bafflement. Ban Meng could only brace himself and ignored them.

"Hey, lil' Ban Ban, you brought a friend?" A guy with a weird hairstyle approached them. On his scalp was a strip of hair running in the center from the front to back. The look he gave Ban Meng was not friendly.

The guy turned to Ye Chong looked him over. "I say, brother, why're you with this piece of sh*t? You a piece of sh*t too?"

The class roared with laughter at that, and Ban Meng's face flushed.

Ye Chong looked like a bookish, meek student by all means. No one would have guessed the strength he had in him.

"Watch your words, Duo Fei! Don't think you're so great just

because your dad's a Level 6 shooter, you're just relying on your old man's reputation!" Ban Meng talked back with a red face.

Duo Fei's father was Duo Ka, the only Level 6 shooter in Yedda city. Duo Fei had always been proud since he was young, and did not like people suggesting how he was only relying on his father. Duo Fei smiled coldly, "Okay, Ban Meng, I see that you've forgotten your place in the short time since we've last met. Hehe."

He walked away with a cold smile after that.

The other students in class watched Ban Meng in surprise. They never imagined that Ban Meng would actually talk back, given his usual submissive behaviour. Little did they know that Ban Meng was actually afraid that the ignorant people around him would offend the ruthless stranger, so he went out of his way to prevent that from happening.

Ye Chong and Ban Meng sat in the last row. Ye Chong was not interested in such childish confrontations, much less be offended by them. The way he saw it, if you had a problem with someone, you should just take him out, simple as that. A battle with words had no practical value.

"Why didn't you just fight him?" Ye Chong asked Ban Meng, and added, "You don't have to look out for me."

"Of course I wasn't looking out for you!" Ban Meng cursed inside. Not even everyone in the class combined was enough to bring down this man. Ban Meng was afraid that Ye Chong would kill everyone in school. He would be in so much trouble if that happened.

"He'll lose if he fights you," Ye Chong deduced from the two student's physical outlook.

"What's the use of fighting? He has a license, and weapons. It'll be easy for him to kill me," Ban Meng said, disagreeing with Ye Chong.

"Then you should kill him first." Ye Chong's words were a chilling reminder to Ban Meng that his decision to interfere earlier was the right one. This man had probably killed people, repeatedly.

The teacher entered the class right then. He was looked like an average joe, middle-aged.

The teacher did not so much as glanced at Ban Meng and his new friend before starting the class.

Today's class was on some techniques in parapsychic control.

Ye Chong listened in for a while before realizing what parapsychic control actually was. Parapsychic control was very similar to the mental skills that mentalists had. Parapsychic control focused on concentration, but mentalist training emphasized more on a diffused way of mental control. Nevertheless, the two operated on the same principles.

Knowing this, Ye Chong felt that he should be even more careful now. It was hard to predict the powers of skillful mentalists. He knew this from experience. How difficult would it be to fight against a professionally trained combatant with mental abilities like these? Ye Chong could not be sure.

This was a very dangerous world. He should lay low and stay inconspicuous - that was Ye Chong's first conclusion.

Chapter 517: Kristen

"Student next to Ban Meng," said the teacher as the sharp eyes zapped to Ye Chong's side abruptly, "Answer the question : Is Tertiary Control the optimum choice of all controlling methods? Justify your answer."

Ye Chong collected his thoughts and gave his answer gradually, "No, I believe it is not, as Tertiary Control, despite its advantage of multiple connective control, is not as superior as Primary Control in terms of concentration and liberty, but I believe Tertiary Control is unique in its own way...", Ye Chong's voice trailed off.

Ban Mang's eyes were wide as his jaw. The students were astounded, even Duo Fei had a brief astonishment in his disdain.

"Right. Your understanding might be slightly different from the textbook answers, but you managed to provide us a brand new angle on this issue. Impressive," complimented the teacher.

Ye Chong sat down calmly.

"How the hell did you know that? You told me you don't know parapsychic at all!" ranted Ban Meng the moment Ye Chong got himself seated.

Keep acting! Keep acting you pretentious snob!

Glared Ban Meng.

"I just so happened to know it," replied Ye Chong casually. It was Huang Baiyi's works, he wanted a fitting apprentice to be his successor after all. It was a shame that Ye Chong did not have the necessary talent and more importantly, the interests to master the neurokine studies, even though Huang Baiyi pumped everything he had discovered all these years right into Ye Chong's head. So Ye Chong was technically a genius on paper, but not in the neurokine battlefield.

School day was long and it was finally over. Throughout the

whole day, Ye Chong seemed to be the dead serious student compared to Ban Meng. Other than the occasional antisocial moments as he interacted with the other students, Ye Chong appeared to be the expert in other fields. It usually only took a keyword from the teacher before he made pronounced association with the technological system he had learned for years.

One's unfamiliarity in a field was mostly due to the lack of association, the crossing point between two different systems, like technology and culture for example. Once the point had been found, Ye Chong had a much better understanding on the rules and regulations here.

Well, the most helpful, as well as the most essential information should be the location - where exactly was Ye Chong? And how was he supposed to get back to He Yue from here? The classes were not a problem to Ye Chong but he had to get home one day.

He gave it a thought and felt great suspicion of that black disc, the distortion disc, the odd "spatial window phenomena" Kui claimed. But how did it work? He had been walking around the edge for long yet something just had to happen at the worst timing.

There must be something going on in there.

Unfortunately, Ye Chong was not gifted in Space Science. The long chain reaction of Physics formula were beyond his comprehension.

So there remained one sole task at the moment - he had to make himself a part of this place, as soon as possible, to ensure his survival before he made it back to He Yue at least. Then from there he would begin plotting an actual escape plan or perhaps trying to contact Mu/Shang.

The class bell was wailing.

"Come, I'll show you the weapons," said Ban Meng, a little relaxed upon seeing the hyperactive child beside him acting normal today.

"Mhm." Ye Chong got up and followed Ban Meng to the outside.

"Hmph." Duo Fei did not seem pleased of the two boys getting along.

...

Sauntering on the street, Ye Chong was seemingly serene, without that panicked look-around when he first arrived at this city. Ban Meng, meanwhile, was ahead of him, appeared to be pondering as his head lowered.

"Yup, we are here." They were at a rather quiet corner of the city. There was a lawn, or perhaps a garden, an isolated ground from the hustles and bustles.

That was when Ye Chong felt something.

Beep!

A silver crane flew towards them!

Light grenades showered the ground.

Ye Chong squinted his eyes as time began flowing slow. The world had become a slow-motion, the sound of light grenades faded out as his gaze converged upon the flying crane, on which fine linings like a spiderweb were formed.

The Jie expert was leading the show today.

That was Ye Chong's exclusive move.

He could discern every firing in his eyes, the orbits, the shapes - traveling like a logical, mathematical calculation before him.

The spiderweb vanished upon the breeze and his pupils relaxed.

Boom! Crash! Boom!

The grenades bombarded the surrounding, veiling up the dust, smudging choking the two boys.

"Duo Fei! Dang it!" said Ban Meng angrily. He recognized that crane! The Silver Arrow! He knew Duo Fei would seek revenge for

the humiliation he got today!

Good-for-nothing boy is sure good-for-nothing.

Thought Ye Chong as he looked at the silver crane.

Like really, if you have problem with Ban Meng or me, why don't you just get down and fight immediately? Save both parties' time, plus, this method of assassination could do barely a thing to us.

Ye Chong did not really perform evasion, since as he had said, he would be hardly hurt by these grenade showers. Moreover, the smudge would give him a good camouflage.

"Which silly brat is messing up MY place?" The thunderous voice bombarded , as a beauty with brownish long hair stood with a stomp behind them. She was wearing a leather camisole, revealing the bouncy pairs as well as the fair, lean long legs which contributed to her enchanting curves in that tight apparel. The crimson lips were clipping a lighted cigarette as her slim arm wielded a broad tube about her height.

"Ugh!" She spat the cigarette, as she lifted the clearly heavy tube over her shoulders. Her eyes were glaring like an owl.

"Get the hell down here, right now!"

And a beam was fired from the tube, all the way towards Duo Fei's crane.

Meanwhile, Duo Fei was still in his triumphalism from the victory of social service of putting the trash at the right place, as his smiley eyes fixed upon the dirty face of Ban Meng. "Sometimes trash needs to learn his place," he muttered as he was going to pilot the crane away.

But who knew? A broad beam just passed the right wing of the crane.

Duo Fei, upon the sound of explosion, looked at the ground.

Holy Dopamine! A woman was lifting a fearsome looking cannon,

cussing him in the worst anger he could imagine.

A hand-carried single barrel light cannon? That was real heavy firearm! Silver Arrow would be joining the ground if it got hit by that blast!

Duo Fei frantically accelerated his crane and ran away.

Geez! Why are there so many lunatics on the street today? Duo Fei seriously begged for a wormhole to send him somewhere lightyears away.

"Dang it. It's been so long that my sense got numb. I actually missed that b*stard!" cursed the beauty as she slammed the cannon to the ground.

Crash! The ground cracked like the aftermath of a meteorite fall. One should be able to imagine the weight of that handheld whale now.

"So why is this twerp here?" said she, ignoring Ban Ming, her eyes focused on Ye Chong.

"My cousin, my beloved sis, I am just inviting my friend to see your masterpieces. He has passion for weaponry," said Ban Meng.

Yes, that was Ban Feng's cousin, named Kristen.

"This twerp?" Kristen did not sound impressed, "You are telling that this pea-sized kiddo wants to check out my weapon? With the breadth of his arm he can't even hold hand of a lady throughout a Sunday movie night, and he wants to hold a cannon? You're kidding me, right?"

She approached Ye Chong, in a confrontational manner, "Kiddo, go play with your action figure or something. These weapons are dangerous."

And Ye Chong could feel an aroma crawling into his nose.

Well, it appeared that the lass did not intend to let Ye Chong in, so he began pondering... he thought about a way to go in, whether

the simple way or the complicated way.

Mhmm, he seemed to fancy the complexity better, since well... the simple, straightforward manner of him doing things always got him in the way eventually.

"I believe it could be appropriate to recognize the requirement of matching the weapon-type to its user's physique but I also believe there is no absolute correlation between them," said Ye Chong, like a bookworm on an academic debate.

"Oh c'mon sis, you got to show us," pleaded Ban Meng, simply because he did not want the walking bomb beside him to blow up at the moment.

"You seem to know something, eh, twerp. Why don't you get free huggies from me, awww you cute little thing!" Kristen, ignored her cousin again, reached out to Ye Chong, feeling like to squeeze the little boy into her gorgeous spheres.

And Ye Chong quickly took a step back, dodging the seductive grip of Kristen.

"Oh?" Kristen seemed impressed, "I did not expect you to be a platonic lover. I like you," said Kristen as her arms wrapped upon her spheres, with a suggestive smile, "Well, if you want to view my weapons, it's all here. As long as you behave... for starters, lifting this with one arm, like me?" She pointed the ground-shattering cannon she used just now, Kristen gave Ye Chong a proposition.

"This?" Ye Chong tilted his head.

"Yes, this. I love strong man who could lift things like a superhero." She winked, the smile had brewed into something else...

Hah! Of course this. I can't be asking you to lift me a toothpick. Nerds like you will never be able to lift this cannon. It's a heavy firearm about 150 kg, probably thrice of your weight, which only beefy men could wield fine, or maybe a monster like myself.

Please, Ban Meng, if you want to bring guests over, bring the real deal alright? At least the boy is cute, let me teach him some lesson.

Ye Chong walked towards the cannon and bowed. He did not lift it right away, instead he gave a careful observation first.

It was indeed a powerful cannon, but it lacked dexterity, as well as the necessary frequency to make it applicable in all war scenes.

That was Ye Chong's comment.

Meanwhile, Kristen was waiting that drama to happen, as she looked at Ye Chong. She presumed that quiet staring by this boy a clear sign of lack of confidence.

After analyzing the strength of the weapon, Ye Chong already had a judgement in his mind. He reached his hand upon the cannon. A simple lift, "Is this what you want?" He looked at Kristen, he did it.

Kristen almost lost her eyeballs as astonished by the scene, "H-h-h-how???"

Ban Meng sneered, the indifferent boy was pretty strong alright? His cousin would soon face doom.

Ye Chong stared at Kristen calmly, contrary to how Kristen looked at him like a monster. Well, Ye Chong was confused of the meaning of the trial since 150kg was not considered lightweight but not exactly super heavy either. In He Yue galaxy, almost everyone could lift such weight, especially the Sangs, who probably could lift it like a school bag.

So why the shock? Ye Chong was bewildered.

"Oh my lord, so you're actually an expert. I can't believe my eyes would fail me one day." A mocking smile from Kristen, her face cold like the hail. Towards the drastic expression change, Ye Chong was still calm, with the cannon in his grip.

"Fine," she said and gave an unfriendly stare, "Come in." And she

led the guests in.

The whole room was filled with different weapons.

"Look, once broken considered sold," said Kristen coldly, which after that she stormed out of the room. She still had works to do on her desk outside, as she put on her blue working uniform and a cap.

Ye Chong was having fun touring the never-before-seen weapons before him, while Ban Meng had nothing else better to do than sitting at his reserved quiet corner.

Ye Chong picked a weapon up and very soon after he placed it back.

After moment, he had a conclusion in his mind. These weapons were all wooden. Though it might sound unimpressive compared to the metallic giants out there, these wooden weapons were not toys. They seemed to be made out of extraordinary woods... which bestowed them excellent physical attributes almost competent as the alloys and they all prominently shared a characteristic - a great compatibility with energy condensation.

So probably that was why these energy firearms were all wooden. And yes, Ye Chong did not miss any weapon. There was in fact no metallic weapon inside the room. Well, it was a little odd, did the place produce no metal at all? He felt like investigating this at some point.

He was presented with an array of energy firearms but Ye Chong had hardly used one before. He did craft it once, Farqua for Mu/Shang was his work, though under Mu/Shang's supervision. That session alone was sufficient to educate him the very basic of energy firearm.

The structure of such weaponry was not complex yet it produced amazing projectile. He was not sure if it was because of the characteristics of these woods, but these firearms did appear to be

much smaller than he imagined while they also used a kind of partially opaque crystallization as the energy source. Ye Chong had never seen such crystallization before. Although the energy content was far lower than Teardrops, it was far greater than the batteries used in the armory of ships from both Five Galaxies and He Yue Galaxy.

Such a strange place...

Chapter 518: Product

Ye Chong could not help but to shake his head. Design-wise, there was nothing particularly stunning about the these energy based weapons. The striking performance should be because of its superior materials. And regarding those, to be frank, Ye Chong had never seen such bizarre-looking woods and crystallization, while they did convince Ye Chong that they could be the best candidates to produce energy based weapons.

Nevertheless, he felt it was a total waste of decent materials when they were used to make such weapon type, especially when the design was poor to begin with. It was never humanistic to begin with. It looked crude, there was not even an aiming assisting device installed on every weapon. No wonder they were meant for spiritual shooters, nobody could aim their arrows even at a giant without neurokinetic aids.

Certainly the marksmen well-trained on their parapsychic would be perfect for this overly innovative weapon. They would need no assisting device in aiming. Their powerful spirits would be more than enough to help them reveal the enemies within the proximity at the shortest time possible, while producing firing at a humbly 100% accuracy.

But that was only if the enemies were within the proximity.

How about a distance farther away from their proximity?

Ye Chong had always been fighting in the galaxies, where wars between spaceships and mechs in the void were so far the most common, in which each unit would be easily over few hundreds, even thousands kilometers away from each other. Would this weapon-design be practical? He remembered Huang Baiyi once taught him that, the chance of somebody expanding their parapsychic senses hundreds meters beyond their proximity would be hardly $1 / 120,000,000$. Even the teacher himself could only

sense things at most 60 kilometers away from him.

Well, perhaps, the Mentalists here might be godlike but only godlike. They could have performance like a god but they were still human and there would always be a limit in the anatomy, a slope hindering the growth at a point, where it would be too hard to further improve their spiritual sensitivity.

Furthermore, the designer should be focused on maintaining the performance of the weapon while minimizing the demand on the user's mastery, or the weapon would have no point to exist. It was the thumb rule that every weapon designer should abide by. No use of create a giant toothpick that was too hard to use.

"Mhm? Not of your taste eh?" ridiculed Kristen, which shocked Ban Meng awake.

Ye Chong did not lift his head, he just gently placed the weapon down. "Just checking it out a little," he said.

That was when someone came to knock on the door.

"Who the-" Kristen frowned as she stormed towards the door.

"Greetings, Ms. Kristen," greeted a man with his partner. The man was in a dark-green patterned skirt, standing next to a lady in a pretty chivalrous attire.

Kristen's brows loosened, "Mr. Mo, what brought you here?" Mr. Mo was a wealthy merchant, well-known for his gentle and courteous nature in the city.

"Ms. Kristen." Mr. Mo smiled, "This... is a friend of mine. She just got back from the Mist, well you see, she might have gotten back alive, but her weapon was damaged during a fight with the beast. So she wishes to get a fitting weapon from a talented designer, so we came to you, Ms. Kristen, you are known for your god-given hands. I hope our visit did not cause you any inconvenience."

"Hmm..." Kristen gave a nod, "Well, if it's Mr. Mo's friend, then it's my friend too. No problem. Well, all these are available, take

any you like. But before that, as you know, I don't do purchases here. I only do trades. So you'll need something special to exchange."

Mr.Mo took a look at the lady next to him, who nodded as she replied, "Alright, I wonder if you are interested in the amapolla wood..." Her voice was hoarse and deep.

"Amapolla?" There was glow in Kristen's eyes, "Okay, no problem. Pick anything you like."

The lady nodded and began browsing the weapons on the rack in silence.

She had rapid eyes, it was as if she was seeking that fateful moment of connection with one particular weapon among the crowd, instead of actually inspecting them. Well she did take a few of them to have a look but she, like Ye Chong, would place it down right after. A few minutes lapsed and she looked at Kristen.

"That's all you have?" She sounded disappointed.

"Uhhh..." Kristen halted for a moment, "Sec." She walked to the other room and brought out a few boxes onto the table, "These are the precious of my works. Some of them were my old masterpieces." She opened up the boxes and the lady expressionlessly moved to the table.

This time, instead of a quick window shopping, she gave a careful inspection on every piece. She would give a grip, a brandish, a caress before placing them down. 10 minutes lapsed, "Well, you have good weapons but they do not fit my hands well," she shook.

Kristen was feeling helpless. She would love to grab that amapolla wood but it was very difficult for a shooter to get a weapon that felt nice to the grip. It almost felt like a real need of fate or fortune sometimes. Nothing technical there.

"Is there... anything else?" asked the lady as she looked at Kristen with expectations. Those masterpieces were indeed excellence so

she seemed more interested now. She was truly in need of a fitting weapon.

Kristen wanted to shake her head and cancel this deal remorsefully but something came into her mind - that imagery where this strange boy also shook his head upon seeing her crafts. Perhaps...?

"I'm sorry. I have no other weapons here."

"I see..." The lady was literally disappointed, "Well, can't help it I guess. At least I manage to behold these masterpieces today."

"BUT!" The tone changed drastically on Kristen.

"Ms. Kristen, do you happen to have one more thing in the drawer?" The lady returned to her attentive self.

"Perhaps, he could help you out," said Kristen, with her finger pointed at Ye Chong.

Wow, poor boy.

Ban Meng was terrified by Kristen's behavior. It seemed like she got a new target to shoot, and it was the cold-hearted man too. Someone would be hurt, really soon.

The lady looked at Ye Chong in bewilderment, "You mean... this young man?"

"Yes. This young man seems to have a unique understanding on weaponry. Perhaps he could give some help," said Kristen.

Ye Chong was not astonished by the plot twist. His expression remained frozen. And it was this frozen expression that convinced the lady that maybe the young man was in fact a master craftsman in disguise.

"Hello, sir. I wonder if you could help me out?" she asked, with a formal bow upon Ye Chong.

"How much?" asked Ye Chong after a moment of consideration with his head tilted, "How much is amapolla wood?"

It was an unexpected question which resulted a total dead silence in the next 30 seconds.

It was unexpected because a real professional craftsman would not ask such silly question. Premium materials like amapolla wood were obviously something that not a man could afford simply because he had enough money for it. No mechanic would ask a question like this! Only an outsider, a novice, a layman would question the value of amapolla.

Like really, if he doesn't know the value of amapolla, how would he possibly be a good craftsman?

That was what everyone had in mind.

"Well." Kristen was the first to react, she said, "If you could get that piece of wood, I'm willing to buy it with 1,000,000 Ao."

Hmm... sounds expensive?

Ye Chong lacked the concept of the value of Ao but it looked like a colossal amount. He did need more pennies in his wallet, compared to some precious piece of wood from nowhere, considering how he had a full inventory of premium materials in his ring.

"Okay," said Ye Chong.

The girl, upon realizing the whole intention of Kristen's little gesture, could feel the blood fading away from her cheeks. The atmosphere was cold, as her eyes popped at Kristen.

Kristen too had a pale expression, with regrets tinting her face. She could sense it! The upheaval in the atmosphere, the brewing blizzard, this lady, she must be an expert, at least a Level 5! Only somebody Level 5 and above could exert such pressure! She was playing with fire the whole time?!

Ban Meng was looking for a rathole at the corner just to make sure he could run away in time.

Mr. Mo was calm, as expected from a merchant, but there was somebody else, unaffected by the storm.

That was Ye Chong.

Mr. Mo was naturally unaffected since he was in a kind of association with the lady. But Ye Chong? The boy who did not even comprehend the value of amapolla wood was actually feeling nothing in the atmosphere?

The lady was finding this boy strange as she withdrew her expression.

The atmosphere lightened, as calming as before.

"I would need to borrow the facilities here, the materials too," said Ye Chong.

"Alright." Before Kristen the owner could give her approval, the girl had already nodded her head and replied. She then glanced at Kristen who acted like a poor scalded kitten by then.

"Any requirements for your weapon?" asked Ye Chong.

"Penetrability. High frequency of shooting, with sufficient accuracy. Adaptability in different climates," she stated her requirements.

"What about sizes? The weight?"

"Not too huge, preferred it portable, a weight less than 40kg."

"Are you left or right-handed?"

"Left! I'm left-handed!" The lady sounded a little excited now, well that was probably why she could not find a fitting weapon without a hassle. She was left-handed and weapons for left-handed person were hard to find to begin with.

"Lay both of hands, with arms wide spread."

The lady obeyed the request and spread her arms across, "Alright, done," said Ye Chong after a quick glance.

Kristen was stunned by the conversation between this layman-looking boy and this clearly talented shooter. She never imagined of having such inquiry before a purchase. She usually just made whatever that popped up in her mind and placed the products on the rack for the customers to choose.

Ye Chong went to Kristen's seat before. He would need the materials here.

His gaze first laid upon a pale blue stick on the table, about 90 centimeters long, with white glitters across the body. He observed that most weapons on the rack were made out of such wood.

Well, be it the name or the functionality of these materials on the table, Ye Chong had zero knowledge regarding them. So he played safe anyway, starting from the common material.

The lady was not impressed by his choice. Speckled blue fir was a pretty common wood in the market, almost every standard weapon was made out of such wood. There was hardly any advanced, premium weapon when this wood was involved, since its tolerance towards energy firing was not high, so it would work like a toy, to be frank.

Ye Chong was silently calm.

He was not aware of the capacity of this piece of wood, so he intended to first figure out the maximum energy tolerance of this wood. The method would be simple, obviously he had to carry out an experiment.

The methodology was rather simple. He would be carving a simple circuit over the surface of speckled blue, then he would trigger the flow of energy from the crystallization, and he would amplify the energy flow during the process.

Yes, little bit more, okay, more...

Boom!

The speckled blue broke into two.

Okay that would be the highest energy tolerance, which was a bit surprising to Ye Chong to be frank. It was a rather high figure, much higher than the alloys he had seen before. That explained why all the wooden firearms now!

Now that Ye Chong had gotten the figure, he had a plan.

He did not utilize any of the facilities available, since he was not familiar with them. The outcome would not be optimum if he used an unfamiliar apparatus, especially those facilities were parakinetically demanding. They required much more careful handling due to the enhanced sensitivity of humans under parakinesis.

"Where's my dagger?" asked Ye Chong towards Ban Meng at the corner.

Ban Meng hurriedly took out the dagger and threw to Ye Chong.

Once the dagger was withdrawn from the sheath, Kristen was immediately overwhelmed. No one at the place had noticed the bit of shock going on in her pupils.

It was a dagger made out of something she had never seen before. The people were shocked into silence, as they could hear their intensifying breaths.

Ye Chong lifted the dagger and gently scratched the surface of speckled blue randomly.

The films of the chipped wood fell off the place.

Ye Chong was concentrated, as his hand danced across the wood, yet like a machine it crossed the surface, with accuracy like manufacturing machine. The films of wood were all identical. It was the accuracy that captured the attention.

Within twinkling of eyes, the speckled blue had transformed into a smooth, flawless rod in Ye Chong's hand. The body was polished, the fair white spots were like the cherry blossoms on spring.

That was not it. Ye Chong intended to hollow the rod, so he could make it an actual cannon tube, which was the trickiest part of the entire crafting process, since the inner wall must not contain any flaw to ensure proper energy transition.

He cautiously crafted a circle at the cross-section of the rod.

Be it the lady or Kristen, with their enhanced senses by parakinesis, both of them could see the detail in Ye Chong's craft and certainly they were again amazed by it. It was a perfect circle, that almost felt like he drew it with a precise geometric apparatus, and it was just a simple cut promptly from his dagger.

Ye Chong then drew a similar circle at the other side.

The depth of the cut, the diameter, the shape of the circle, everything was precisely identical. It was astounding!

Ye Chong then put the dagger down and reached his hand into the pocket, looking for something.

It was a curious sight, as the people wondered what Ye Chong would be pulling out from his pocket.

Well, the reality was... there was nothing in his pocket. It was just his typical smoke and mirrors, a camouflage to what he was doing. The thing he wanted was resting inside the dimensional keystone.

So he just dug into the pocket, which eventually gave him a bottle of dark green fluid.

Everyone was confused yet fascinated at the same time, as they looked at this half bottle of fluid.

It was actually a very strong corroding agent, which was obtained on one of Ye Chong's adventure in the Consortium base on Spectre back then. Ye Chong was familiar with such agent, he created Liquid of Shang after all.

Rather than figuring out on "how" to hollow the tube, Ye Chong

had an idea on "what" to hollow the tube.

Only if he had Liquid of Shang, with its excellent capability, a simple drop could have fulfilled the task for him. Well, he was not aware of the name of this green bottle, he knew it was a corroding agent merely because of the warning label on it. There were a rack of them back in the base, but Ye Chong could not bring everything away, so he just picked a random bottle.

Fortunately, the bottle had a dropper at the cap, which saved him a lot of trouble. The curiosity intensified so much that everyone could not help but to reach their neck like a giraffe, popping their eyes just to see what the heck was going on.

Oh, before hollowing the tube, he got to test the capability of this agent. So Ye Chong stacked 3 pieces of speckled blue he took from the table and he dripped the agent.

Ssssss...

Sizzling was heard as a column of green smoke rumbled. The board was being corroded at a perceivable rate. The board was then pierced, with an irregularly shaped hole which reached all the way through even the table itself.

A horrified gasp could be heard in the room.

Such corrosion!

Kristen, Mr. Mo and Ban Meng had a colorless face by then, even the lady was feeling uneasy at the sight.

Ye Chong was a little surprised but his expression remained unchanged.

He pondered for a moment before he finally made his move.

Using the dropper, he first sucked about 15 drops of the agent.

His left hand rested with the wooden rod standing. His right hand holding the dropper and with extreme caution, he pressed the valve of the dropper.

The atmosphere was intense. Whether it would become an invention or an accident, it all depended on this very drop now.

A thin stream of liquid flowed out of the dropper.

Before the liquid reached the cross-section of the rod, Ye Chong replaced the dropper with a speed of lightning.

The people could see nothing than a brief afterimage.

And that was the last straw to the lady's crumbling serenity. Her expression changed!

The withdrawn right hand returned to its position, clipping the rod to support the other hand this time.

The stream of liquid was traveling in slow motion in Ye Chong's eyes.

It dripped, it landed and touched the surface, the gradual sizzling was heard again.

Ye Chong began rubbing his hands.

Chnnngggg!

The rod started vibrating, as the resonance bounced all around the room.

The lady had lost the colors on her face at last.

The rapid spinning rod allowed the liquid to contact and corrode the surface uniformly. Ye Chong's eyes focused upon the rod as his rubbing hands tried to control the angle and momentum of the rod.

Such technique would complicate anyone on strength control, even the master of strength control himself.

It almost looked like an acrobatic performance in the eyes of the people.

The hollowed space of the tube grew deeper and larger, the sizzling grew louder.

And out of sudden, silence returned.

Ye Chong stopped rubbing his hands and took a careful look at his craft. The inner wall had a satisfyingly even surface. To be frank, he was not particularly confident in this exaggerating performance. But really he could not summon a whole table of professional apparatuses right from the keystone, it probably would frighten the people and cause havoc, so he succumbed to this pretty crude, primitive method instead.

He liked his tube. It looked fine.

After the most challenging step had been done, nothing else should stop Ye Chong. He already had a blueprint of the beam shooting circuit in his mind. He decided to go for the not-so-complicated design that would produce a decent projectile, with a twist of course.

He had to make a few changes, considering how this gun would use no battery but a tiny light crystallization. He would revolve the circuit about this crystallization and pick the most common trigger he observed from all the weapons here. Regarding the more effective trigger, he lacked the necessary research for it. He also needed to reverse the circuit so it would fit the left-handed lady.

Throughout the entire process, Ye Chong had only used his dagger and the corroding agent. He used nothing else.

"Done," said Ye Chong, as he calmly presented his craft to the lady.

Chapter 519: Organization

It was a long slim tube which the white spots scattered like powder snow upon the sky blue body, about 1.65 meter in length, 34 kilograms in weight, of a condensed structure which could be disengaged into several parts that could be again combined into different forms of miniature firearms. A fancy mix-and-match design that could be equipped on one's arm, thus the convenience of shooting upon free will. The weight of the miniature version had hardly 8kg weight which also contributed to portability.

"Do you have a place to try this out?" said the lady, with intense expectation brewing inside her. She had never seen such revolutionary design before, it was extremely foreign to her eyes yet miraculously fitting to her hands. She had the urge to test the strength of this new weapon she was bestowed upon. It was that passion every shooter like her had which drove her. "Is there any place to test shooting?" said she loudly.

Kristen was shocked back into reality, she nodded hurriedly, "Yes, yes, yes, come with me!"

They arrived by the basement under her lead. She unlocked the gate and turned on the lights, "This is the shooting room, the standard setup." She gave a brief introduction before retreating herself to the "auditorium" at one side with the rest of the crew who were equally interested of this strange-looking weapon.

Into position! Without further ado, the lady raised the gun and made her first shot promptly.

A stream of red beam about breadth of one's thumb struck the very center of the bullseye. Her accuracy as a professional had been justified, still she could not hide that excitement of a little girl on Christmas as she hurried her way to the front to remove the bullseye from the attachment. She was there to examine the strength of the new weapon, likewise the others. "Such strength!"

Astonishment filled Kristen's words upon seeing the charred edges of the pierced center.

A standard setup was the typicality in most shooting rooms, where bullseyes were made out of nubis stones which had a mediocre energy-absorbing attribute, perfect for making bullseye but not protective shield due to its brittleness. People used such material to examine the capabilities of an energy-based weapon.

And that red beam just penetrated a 5 centimeter thick bullseyes made out of energy-absorbing stones.

The few spectators froze upon the astounding sight.

Mr. Mo could not help but to compliment dramatically, "I might be considered a novice when it comes to weapon but this ray gun has earned my fondness. Such masterpiece."

The lady lowered her head, caressing that gun with a unique appearance lovingly. It needed no word to describe her joy at the moment.

Ban Meng coveted that new toy, he continued marveling at it mindlessly, unaware of the stream of saliva dripping off his mouth's corner. Kristen, his cousin had her mentality shattered to the ground, the invention of this ray gun had utterly deconstructed what she knew about weapons for the past few years. It was only a stick made out of speckled blue yet it actually impaled a piece of nubis stone. She could not believe her eyes, reality was standing right there. She was the witness to every step, every flick of finger the lady made. The mystery intensified... she could not help but to have questions overloading her head.

How comes it could make such strong shoot? What is that structure? How the heck did it even work? What are the effects of this strange design? What is the concept behind it?

She could even imagine the shape of each component involved, however, she could never replicate the design. It was of techniques

she had never seen before, it was of foreign structure design, everything was unfamiliar to her, even the way the boy crafted the gun was something revolutionary. These were so new that she realized, to her horror, that she hardly learned anything from this master craftsman.

And that was when the lady performed a multi-shot which landed across the bullseye like a shower. None of the beams had missed. It was a goddess's accuracy that had mesmerized everyone at the scene, well, except for our craftsman, Ye Chong. He was terrified since he realized how the lady could be a highly skilled parakinetic shooter and it would be a hard nut to crack if he did not have Celest by his side. His schemata ran wild, piecing together a feasible plot to handle such opponent.

"Mhmm..." The lady placed the ray gun down with satisfaction, she loved its portability and the hand-on experience, everything felt truly made for her, that it almost felt like a part of her.

"Here is your reward, as promised." The lady passed Ye Chong amapolla wood with a hint of respect in her hoarsely spoken words. The amapolla woodpiece was about size of one's palm, a grayish brown with cravings like the shell of the turtle. It was totally different compared to what Ye Chong had seen in the workshop. He could feel the weight the moment the wood was placed onto his hand. But, other than the strange craving and the slightly greater weight in comparison, he could not tell anything extraordinary about this wood.

"Oh, allow me to introduce myself," said the lady formally, "I'm Sha Ya, a Level 8 shooter."

The moment the title was mentioned, the atmosphere seemed to have frozen.

Ban Meng felt he was in trance upon hearing the rank. Did a Level 8 shooter, an almost-mythical figure just walk into his cousin's place and begin walking around and actually performed

her skills? He nearly pinched his cheeks to confirm he was not dreaming.

Kristen had never regained her color since the last shock. A level 8 shooter? Were her ears acting up? She was impressed of her courage, that she virtually offended a Level 8 god!

Ye Chong remained expressionless. He was not aware of the meaning behind that title.

Ye Chong's indifference did not enrage Sha Ya, as she took out a piece of golden leaf from her pouch, "This is plucked from the Darkniss. A token of appreciation for your great work."

"Golden leaf?!" Everyone was so close to making a leap, even Mr. Mo.

The golden leaf was reflecting the world in amazing shine, where the veins could be clearly discerned, as if the finest gold craft of a piece of leaf. But Ye Chong could tell it was not a sculpture, rather it was truly something offered by nature.

It should be from a highly "metalized" plant.

"Thank you," said Ye Chong as he took the leaf, now a little intrigued of the "Darkniss" Sha Ya mentioned.

"I should be the one thanking you." She looked overjoyed, "I have been searching for a fitting weapon and I can't believe I'll ever lay my hand on one." Her words were sentimental as she recalled the journey she took in search of her weapon.

"Alright, I have to go now. I'm staying at Bisley City. If you need any help, don't hesitate, call me up. Asking someone on your behalf works too," said Sha Ya, well, she was in fact the right person to provide solid help.

Ban Meng fired his stare of pure envy at Ye Chong for this inhuman boy was actually able to win over a level 8 shooter's friendship. It was as if dreams.

"See ya." And Sha Ya left. Ye Chong walked to Kristen and lifted the piece of wood. "Let's trade," he said.

Ye Chong, with his pocket full of a million ao and a new ally in his social circle, led Ban Meng back home. Ban Meng had become one of Ye Chong's believers by then, he was overawed by Ye Chong's capabilities.

"I need a house. Large and somewhere isolated. Would you help me?" asked Ye Chong abruptly.

"Uhh... let me think..." Ban Meng began searching for the matching item in his mind. That sounded sufficiently a good news to him, he would never want a potential explosive to follow him home daily. It would be great if he could send this walking bomb somewhere else.

Then a place came into his mind.

...

They took a few detours and finally stopped by one house.

"How about this place?" asked Ban Meng, as he looked at this particular house which fulfilled Ye Chong's requirement - it was spacious, about 3500 meter² including the lawn, while being at a quiet corner of the region close to the Duality Forest. He could not imagine any visitor frequenting here. It was a pretty good deal too - 100,000 Ao and it was all Ye Chong's.

"I like it," Ye Chong nodded expressively.

"Of course! Let Ban Meng make the choice, it'll never go wrong!" responded Ban Meng proudly.

"Right. You can go now," ordered Ye Chong the guest-vanquisher.

"Geez, that fast?!" Ban Meng sobbed, "Fine, good bye."

And he left.

The quiet home was very quiet again.

It was rather empty as there was nothing else than the few pieces of furnitures. Well, that was what Ye Chong desired. He needed a place to sleep and store his loots.

He quickly deployed Celest which stood there solemnly at his service. Ye Chong hopped into Celest and performed a thorough scan to see if there was anything suspicious.

To his relaxation, system returned no detection of any form. He had finally some me-time and actual security to think about his next move.

What would be my priority? To find Mu/Shang of course.

Where's Mu/Shang? They must be at Gray Valley.

Well, if that's the case, I would have to first return to Gray Valley, or He Yue galaxy at the very least. Only then I would have the slightest chance of reuniting with Mu/Shang or the Sangs if I have to. Next, we shall reconnect the pathway connecting both He Yue galaxy and Gray Valley.

Alright, the ultimate goal would be to return to either of the regions.

But then... how should I do it... Hmm...

Wait...

Ye Chong remembered the three microchips Kui gave him, which contained researches by Consortium involving Space Science, Mechanical Science and Biologic Science. And he did mention something about Space Science that interested Ye Chong. Perhaps the answer lay within that chip.

He took the chip out and slid it into the processor of Celest.

"Reading..."

"Welcome to the Directory."

"Please select from one of the available processes:

1. Read data
2. Create database
3. Perform Simulated Calculation"

Ye Chong dazed at the prompted interface. He had zero knowledge regarding Space Science, it would take forever before he mastered the basics, he had no more time to initiate his first Space Science class.

"Perform Simulated Calculation," stated Ye Chong.

"Error : Database not found. Database required for operation," replied the processor coldly.

Ye Chong sighed, "Create database."

"Command received. Creating database, estimated time remaining : 5hours 30minutes."

And Ye Chong rooted himself at the seat for the next 5 hours and 30 minutes, finally after that, "Perform Simulated Calculation - Ways to Travel to He Yue Galaxy." Somehow Ye Chong could feel his heart twitching by the little searing anticipation growing in him.

"Creating the necessary platform..."

...

Creation completed!"

"Inserting the given properties..."

...

Insertion completed!"

"Simulation performing..."

"..."

"Calculation completed. Estimated time needed: 32years 5months 23days." The time length was so unexpected that Ye Chong's

mouth remained partially open.

THIRTY TWO years?! He could not accept that... It would be too long to fix anything...

Ye Chong was blown at first, but he took a breath and calmed down, "How to reduce estimated time needed?"

"Processing..."

10 seconds later, "Matching Solutions found:

1. Provide more properties for calculation
2. Enhance memory processing ability."

"How to enhance memory processing ability?" asked Ye Chong.

"To enhance memory processing ability, you could:

1. Enhance my capacity.
2. Connect additional processing unit."

Enhance the capacity? The preposterously vague idea was immediately scrapped. Ye Chong was too unfamiliar with such avant-garde mechanism. He could not even find the sealing board to unscrew.

He could add in more processors by producing them but... he naturally did not excel at it.

"How to produce processor?"

"Error: Insufficient information." The reply was not helpful...

And that was when Ye Chong recalled the second microchip that contained Biologic Science researches. Well, a standard photon processor might sound far-fetched at the moment, but he could have crafted a bio-photon processor like Celest's. The chip should contain the necessary information. He quickly replaced the chip and booted the interface.

"Welcome to th-"

"How to produce bio-photon processor?"

"To produce bio-photon processor, you would need..."

The reply was also extremely helpful. Most materials mentioned were unavailable within his grip, especially when most of them required additional handling like cultivation.

Well... he got to build a biological science lab then... It would be a major project, still he had to complete it. To never give up on even the slightest hope was his motto since childhood.

The saving grace was he scavenged everything useful from the Consortium at their central lab back then, including those technological fascinations, or he would have to really start from scratches.

Though bestowed with fancy technologies, there were still lots of works to do.

The kingdom of organisms, the flora and fauns, were already different across regions, let alone across planets and across the galaxies. Most materials used by the Consortium could not be found here, especially samples of a few organisms.

The first feasible move would be to establish a working database which contained attributes of the native organisms at his place. But before that, there was one last thing he got to do first. Security, security, security. He might have not detected anything, that did not guarantee he would be safe from unwanted attention in the future. He would not want to be pointed with a parakinetic firearm before he even began assembling the new processor.

He first examined woods like speckled blue using the facilities available. He was able to identify that speckled blue had three times the energy compatibility compared to most metals. That was not it, Ye Chong had also performed other examinations and the conclusion? It was earth-shattering! All these plants were excellent on both energy compatibility and physical attributes, which made

them few of the best materials to produce any sort of machines. The downside however, was the poor compatibility with circuit... which justified the non-existent photon processors here...

After understanding the attributes of these materials, Ye Chong could finally produce a stronger and a more efficiently designed weapon.

Ye Chong made bulk purchases on the mentioned materials, including the "honorably mentioned" speckled blues. He began a massive production.

With these utilities he got from Consortium, he no longer would need to rely on dagger to carve simple weapons. His efficiency accelerated the progress significantly. It only took him 7 days to produce over 100 types of weapons.

He then installed these firearms at all corners of the lawn, while equipped them with an advanced detection system. Any unauthorized personnel or "thing" would be destroyed immediately.

A real tactical annihilation!

The installation points were all after Ye Chong's careful calculation which formed a firewall that covered the entire region. No blind spot while being tenacious. Most of them were the real heavy firearms, they were heavy to be carried around but they would be perfect for a fixed point tower defense. A prime example would be the Spheric Beam Scattered Launcher, which launched 160 spheric light beams in one wave thrice per second, covering up proximity about 4 meter^2 .

It was the flawlessness of this firewall that made any intruder defenseless. It was a densely layered security which was unknown at one glance. The penetrability of these beams were much stronger than the little toy gun Ye Chong made for Sha Ya and the detection system further enhanced their accuracy.

The only problem was... the defense matrix would need a processor to provide command. Celest's processor? That intelligibly expressive processor? Maybe not.

He then succumbed to one processor previously installed on one supportive unit in his inventory. It was not a powerful processor but was more than enough to take charge of basic matrix management.

Now, he could sleep at last.

Area 9 meters away from his accommodation was his territory.

The day seemed to be ending.

But his work had just started.

Chapter 520: Under Attack I

Ye Chong decided to make this his biology research laboratory. After some basic fortification works, the lab was now secured. This allowed him to devote his attention to other matters.

Ye Chong left the lab in Celest. He did not head for Dual Forest, but went upwards instead. Celest climbed higher and higher into the sky. Everything on the ground receded further and further away.

Ye Chong wanted to do a full scan of the planet to help him gain a general understanding of the native environment.

Suddenly, a light beam came out of nowhere, directed towards Celest.

Ye Chong reacted swiftly. Celest twisted its body in the air, and the light beam narrowly shot past the mech's body.

"Unidentified flying object!"

"Unidentified flying object!"

"Unidentified flying object!"

...

A series of alarms ear-piercingly blared. Dozens of varying flying vessels could be seen on the holographic screen, heading in that direction.

Old Wei was 41 this year, and a Level 4 shooter. He was at an age where shooters were in their prime. Today, he had planned to visit Dual Forest with his friends to gather some ashram grass. Their group was strong despite having only a few members since they were all Level 4 shooters. Besides, having worked together for years, they were now a solid team that performed more effectively than most other groups.

Suddenly, Old Wei received a parapsychic message from his

friend, "Look, what's that?" Shooters usually communicate with each other via parapsychic messages. There were many advantages to using this method, especially during combat. It was the most direct and clear way of communicating with each other.

Old Wei could sense the strong emotions of surprise in his friend. He knew that his friend must have found something interesting. It was not uncommon to see unusual things in Dual Forest.

The other five in the group received the same message at the same time. The seven flying vessels made a turn together in perfect coordination.

Old Wei now saw what made his friend gasped in surprise!

It was a giant in black armor!

The giant was at least 10 meters all, and it was shooting up fast into the sky, like a rocket.

Old Wei was shocked. As a Level 4 shooter, he was no stranger to unusual things, but this was his first time seeing such a large giant human. The black armor seemed to be made of an unknown material. The eerie red flowers on the armor looked like blood spilled in midnight. The black pack on the giant's back also had a huge red flower on it. Old Wei felt a chill ran down his spine. He felt his heart clenched tightly.

The giant's eyes were half lidded, like it was looking out afar. Were they looking for something, or simply staring out hollowly?

The most shocking thing was, the giant could fly! Old Wei did an estimate, and found that the giant must be faster than his own flying vessel at maximum speed.

"Heavens! What's that?" Someone exclaimed.

"Yea, what a huge giant, and with armor too. Tsk tsk, that's awesome!"

"Look, guys, there are many others who've seen it now. Let's go

get a closer look." Indeed, with such a huge giant materializing in the air, it was hard to go unnoticed. Many flying vessels were now trying to approach the giant.

"Sure!" "Alright!" The suggestion was welcomed by the rest of the group.

Old Wei could not help but interrupt them, "We should still be careful. Safety first. We'll back down if anything looks weird." Old Wei could not understand why he said these words, but he was aware of his own nervousness.

"Yes, Old Wei's right." This came from their captain, Re Guming.

The seven flying vessels flew towards the giant in battle formation. Right then, they saw someone shooting at the giant.

"Is he crazy?" Everyone cried out in an uproar. No one knew what the giant was. Shooting it like that would only be a show of hostility.

What would that shot cost them? Everyone began to worry. An experienced shooter would never make such an idiotic mistake.

The captain, Gu Reming, spoke in his deep voice, "It's a bunch of playboys. They've always been reckless. Let's not get involved. They're in for some deep trouble." Gu Reming spoke coldly. They did not think highly of these so-called playboys.

Everyone in the group trusted their captain's assessment. Besides, they could tell from the way the giant avoided the shot so easily that it could fly well. The more experienced shooters all stayed back, watching from afar. They could see that something was wrong, and did not want to be there when the giant retaliated.

The playboys got even more excited when they found no one else competing with them for the giant. They showed off their fancy tricks in the air as they closed in on Celest, still trying to shoot the mech.

The playboys may be nasty, but they were still a powerful bunch.

Most of them were at least Level 3, and there was even a Level 5 among them. Besides, they had the advantage in numbers.

Their flying vessels were also of top quality, more powerful than the average shooter's. In the next moment, Celest found itself dealing with a full blown laser assault from all sides.

It was impossible to not be angry at this attack that came out of nowhere, but Ye Chong kept his calm.

His hands were a blur on the controls.

The giant in armor extended its limbs, twisting its joints in odd angles and avoiding all the lasers directed at it.

The giant was wrapped in bulky armor, but its body moved easily like it had no bones inside. Its limbs twisted in impossible angles, defying all reason.

Old Wei was shocked. It was like seeing a huge, brutish man with a bearded face that bulged at all the wrong angles, but the face was smiling gently like the man did some delicate sewing with a needle in hand. In short, it was like watching a paradox.

The rest in his group were also stunned by what they saw.

"That - that's a monster!" Someone blurted out.

"What a strong body!" Someone commended.

"Someone's going to suffer," said their captain solemnly.

A bright purple flying vessel with two pairs of wings was doing some difficult stunts in the air, making flips and turns like an airshow pilot. The Snakeshot, Big X, Lateral Shift and other magnificent displays would usually be seen only in practice flights.

The pilot was showing off his multitude of dazzling tricks.

Ye Chong thought it odd that the purple flying vessel was flying around it but not attacking.

However, he had no intention of asking the other party about it.

The flying vessel was already within Celest's range of attack. Ye Chong flung out his shuriken without hesitation.

The fast spinning weapon was very destructive. It also had auto lock-on technology to make it fatal.

Zing!

A black dot shot towards the purple flying vessel.

When the shuriken came within range of the pilot's parapsychic sense, he noticed it right away. The purple flying vessel did a turn and avoided the attack, quick as a bird.

How could such a slow weapon hit a Level 5 shooter? The purple vessel's pilot was proud of himself. He was also the strongest shooter in his team. As a qualified shooter, they would not be hit by something so slow. Parapsychic sense was fast as lightning. Shooters faced the threat of laser weapons from their enemies that could come at any time. Such a slow moving weapon must be an inferior product, it was no wonder he could avoid it so easily.

Just as the pilot was basking in his own success, he noticed that the black dot had made a turn as well and was now heading towards him again.

Huh? How did that happen?

No matter. The pilot maneuvered his flying machine skilfully and avoided the black dot once again. The black dot was slower than his own flying vessel, and much more slower compared to his parapsychic sense. The young man was confident that the weapon would never hit him.

Suddenly, the black dot came within his parapsychic sensing range again. He was still the target of that weapon.

The young man began to realize that something was wrong. He could sense the black dot more clearly by now, and could make out what it was. If he was really hit by that spinning object ... A vision of his flying vessel exploding in the air came to him.

Impossible! He was scared by the vision. He was a Level 5 shooter. How could he be hit by the slow moving plaything? What a joke!

Perhaps due to his nervousness, the pilot did not avoid the attack so gracefully this time.

An innocent, tiny mistake was deadly in his situation. The shuriken gave him no chance. It followed the purple flying vessel closely, closing in the distance until they were only 30 meters apart. The Level 5 shooter could now sense every detailed structure of the shuriken with his parapsychic sense.

However, he was no longer at ease as before. Despite being hailed as a natural born shooter, he did not have much real life combat experience. Usually, he would only fly around with his playboy friends. Ever since he was born, he had never suffered any fallbacks. Most of Yedda knew of the playboys and their background, and would leave them alone.

They never knew how cruel real battles were, compared to their make-believe practice battles.

The pilot felt an immense pressure on him like never before. It was suffocating him, and his flying vessel did not obey his wishes as keenly as it usually did.

Some people would fight back when under pressure, while others would break.

This pilot was obviously not of the former. He was now feeling afraid, very afraid.

Chapter 521: Under Attack II

It was this fear that made him lose his confidence as he flew his flying vessel. What would happen in this fast paced battle if the pilot hesitated?

Scared out of his wits, the pilot did not realize that he was flying towards the strange giant that he had been making fun of.

When he noticed, it was already too late.

The passive giant in black armor moved. Zing! A dark red alloy sword shot out of the weapons pack on its back and landed in its hand. The giant did a swipe and a slash, the sword seemingly meeting no resistance, and the bright purple flying vessel crumbled into pieces in the air.

Old Wei and his group members were stunned speechless.

They did not make out exactly what the giant did, but they could see that behind the swipe-and-slash attack was a combat veteran of great experience.

This allowed them to conclude that the giant in black armor was highly threatening.

The playboys had never seen battles like these. They usually spent their time showing off their tricks, but had never seen real combat and spilled blood. Now that their strongest comrade was killed, they panicked. Some of them began to cry.

Duo Ka and his beloved fighter machine headed towards Dual Forest. He heard that people saw a giant in black armor, reaching over 10 meters tall, and wanted to see it for himself.

Duo Ka's fighter was a light blue colored Blue Flounder II. Nicknamed Blue Lightning, it was a fighter vessel that was first designed more than a decade ago. The fish shaped fighter had two fins that arched inwards. Right above the pilot cabin in its main body was a fixed wing that looked like a shark's dorsal fin. This

was the iconic structure of the model. The fighter was packed with powerful weapons. It had long range shooting capabilities, and could even fire high explosive grenades.

The model was over 10 years old, and was now in its seventh iteration. Nevertheless, Duo Ka never thought of switching to a new fighter. For more than 10 years, he had used and maintained his fighter. He was probably more familiar with his fighter than with his wife. Curiously, the fighter was like a lucky charm for the man. He had survived against impossible odds time and again with his fighter.

"Duo Ka is here," Gu Reming was the first to notice his arrival. He quickly passed on the news to his friends.

Old Wei looked around and saw Duo Ka's blue, old model.

Duo Ka enjoyed a high reputation in Yedda, since he was the only Level 6 shooter in the city. For shooters, Level 5 separated the mediocre and the skillful. A shooter would be considered a pro if they reached Level 5. Levels 3 and 4 were not exactly common, but most shooters fell into these two levels. To go one level up from Level 4, however, was a challenge that all shooters will face. The difference between Levels 4 and 5 was more qualitative. A Level 5 shooter can easily win against a few Level 4 shooters. The difference in strength was so apparent, that many shooters found themselves never achieving Level 5, and could only accept the fact with regret.

Going further up the hierarchy, the second challenge was in going from Level 7 to Level 8. This was much harder than the first challenge. With talent and effort, and some luck, a shooter might just cross the gap. Level 8 shooters were considered geniuses, but the legendary Level 10 shooters were even rarer, and mostly from the past.

Yedda's citizens recognized Duo Ka's old, blue model, and quickly made way for him. They were excited at his appearance, for Duo

Ka was Yedda's best shooter, and rarely fought in public. There were many Level 4 shooters here who would like to see Duo Ka fight, and hopefully gain some insight from it.

Duo Ka was just in time to see Celest's swipe-and-slash and attack. His face turned serious at that. He recognized the bright purple fighter. The pilot reached Level 5 at a young age, a rare talent. However, it seemed that he would not survive. Duo Ka sighed inside, regretting the loss of a genius.

The giant's skills surprised him. As Yedda's only Level 6 shooter, he could discern more than the average person. He sensed great strength behind the giant's every move.

On the contrary, he was not surprised by the giant's huge figure. The universe was vast and full of mysteries. It was not impossible for a giant to exist.

More surprising was the red longsword and armor. He recognized the material, though he did not know its name. He had seen trace amounts of the element in the darker half of Dual Forest. There were more in sandy areas, but only in bits and pieces. He had heard from an elder that these elements were everywhere in that the inner parts of Darkniss, where they came in a variety of colors. Even the plants in the inner parts of the Darkniss were unusual. The creatures that resided in the inner parts of Darkniss were all mysterious and powerful. The inner parts of Darkniss were places that only shooters who reached Level 8 or above could afford to explore. It was a dangerous and elusive place.

Could this odd giant be from the inner parts of Darkniss?

Duo Ka was shaken by where his thoughts lead. However, the more he thought about it, the more it made sense. The heavy black armor, the dark red sword, and the black weapons pack on its back were all made of materials that could only be found in the inner parts of Darkniss.

If that was the case, how did the giant escape from Darkniss?

According to his seniors who had entered Darkniss before, the creatures in there seemed to obey certain rules, having clearly delineated boundaries of activity. This was why none of the creatures from within Darkniss had ever been seen outside.

...

Ye Chong did now know that an expert was watching him. He was now on the aggressive. Without their strongest fighter, the rest of the playboy gang was no threat to Ye Chong.

He had already destroyed three aircrafts. Celest was faster and more agile in the sky compared to these fighter aircrafts. The disparity in their strengths was clear.

Duo Ka decided to act. He may not like the playboys much, but he knew their parents, and could not simply watch from the side as they died in the giant's hands.

Aim, fire.

A blue laser beam shot out from the front of Duo Ka's fighter, aimed at the giant's throat.

Ye Chong had been fighting carefully. He had the upper hand in the battle, but he was still surrounded by many other aircrafts which might ambush him at any time. His vigilance saved his life.

Celest did a Thomas's Spin, while the blue laser barely grazed past the mech's cheek.

Ye Chong was surprised, and looked around to see the blue aircraft. The other aircrafts were watching from a distance, but the blue one had inserted itself into the clearing that was his battleground.

Ye Chong stopped attacking the aircrafts. He felt an intense sense of danger emanating from the blue aircraft.

Without hesitation, Ye Chong executed the move he was most familiar with - Non-Orderly Wavy Leap. Celest zigzagged in the air

like a weightless spirit, defying all laws of physics with its every twist and turn. No one understood what he was doing.

Five laser beams shot towards the spots where Celest was at almost the same time.

The shooter was skilled! Of the five laser beams it avoided, three nearly hit Celest.

The blue beams continued to strike, leaving Ye Chong barely enough time to process them. Duo Ka did not have the habit of talking it out.

The Level 6 shooter was powerful. The shooters around him watched in awe. There were no bells and whistles, but his solid techniques were enough to suppress the giant. Each shot was faster than the one before it. A normal shooter would not have survived the assault.

Ye Chong was experienced in defending himself against long range attacks. Ever since he chose to specialize in close range combat, he had faced all kinds of long range mechs time and again.

However, he was now in a very, very precarious situation!

Compared to all the ambushing or sniping he had survived, this time was much, much worse. The shooter barely took time to aim between shots. The laser beams came strongly at accurate and dangerous angles that made Ye Chong's life difficult.

Celest had switched its alloy sword for a diamond shaped shield. Even so, avoiding the shots was hard.

Ye Chong suddenly recalled a conversation he had with Mu a long time ago. He had once asked Mu if the mech was the strongest attacker. Mu had said no. When Ye Chong asked why, Mu had said that his attacks lacked spirit.

Ye Chong remembered that particular exchange right now. He knew now how deadly a skilled and focused shooter could be. Strength, speed and spirit – of the three elements, the spirit was

the most neglected. However, when excellent spiritual training met long range shooting, the result was a deadly long range attacker.

Xi Feg Tribe had its mentalists, but Ye Chong felt that the shooters here were the ones who truly unlocked the potential of combining spiritual training and shooting.

Ye Chong was not in control of his thoughts. He did not know why he was thinking about all these irrelevant thoughts when in the midst of a battle.

He did now know that his body was fighting back in the most direct way right now.

Evasion!

Evasion and shooting are like twins or nemesis to each other. In the Five Galaxies, long range mechs had been developed for a long time. In this time, evasion techniques were also innovated at an astonishing rate.

Ye Chong's evasion techniques were all over the place.

Irregular Veers, Parallel Retreat, Thomas' Spin, Speckled Moon Spin ...

Effective evasion techniques worked not only to avoid the enemy's attacks, but also to interrupt the shooter's rhythm of attack. Only then could a close range mech close the distance between itself and its opponent. The evasive techniques were all designed to confuse, to make the shooters shoot off target.

Celest moved like a ghost, avoiding all the blue lasers raining down on it.

If Duo Ka's shooting was impressive, Celest's evasion measures were even more astonishing to the observing shooters.

They could not figure out how a massive figure like this giant could make such impossibly deft movements in the air. Compared

to the giant, their aircrafts looked unwieldy.

Duo Ka turned grim. He had not wounded the giant so far. The giant was too fast, using evasion techniques that he had never seen before. So far, he could not do real harm on the giant.

Ye Chong was also having a hard time. His hands never stopped moving. The blue aircraft never stopped shooting its blue laser beams. All he could do now was avoid being hit at the mech's vulnerable spots.

Duo Ka decided to ramp up his attack. The giant was too slick to tackle.

He activated all the guns on his aircraft, and even put his rarely used high explosive grenades into the fray.

Ye Chong noticed Duo Ka's change in strategy instantly.

However, he could not think of any solution aside from trying his best to defend himself. His hands moved faster, turning into a blur on the controls console.

The sudden increase in intensity of the battle came as a surprised to the onlookers. The battle turned more violent as Duo Ka's fighter began spitting out laser beams with even higher frequency.

The giant's diamond shield was already covered with holes, all from the laser beams that hit it.

Without the shield, the laser beams would have hit on Celest's main body.

Ye Chong held on with difficulty as he tried to figure out another way. He must get out of his situation quickly. Just then, a high explosive grenade hit his shield.

Bam! The air cracked with a loud explosion, together with a bright sphere of white light that hurt the eyes.

The explosion was so powerful that it broke the diamond shaped shield into pieces. Celest was pushed to the ground from the

shockwaves of the explosion.

Then, Ye Chong cursed himself for being an idiot.

The battle had started suddenly, and Duo Ka's attacks were so intense that Ye Chong did not have time to think properly. He now realized that fighting a bunch of crazies in the sky with his close range mech was just turning the odds against him.

On the contrary, the dense forest down below was a close range mech's home ground.

Celest curled into itself, blasted its engines at maximum and shot down like a meteor to the bafflement of the onlookers.

Chapter 522: Under Attack III

Of course Duo Ka would not let it go so easily. In fact, he was curious of the giant in armor. Another concern he had was, if the giant was really from within Darkniss, it would spell trouble for all of them. Could it be that something terrible happened in Darkniss?

The problem was a crucial one, for him and for the City of Yedda. Yedda was at the edge of Dual Forest. If the creatures residing in the mysterious Darkniss could cross the Dessert and Mist and enter Dual Forest, it would be a disaster to all of humanity. Besides, Yedda would be the first in line. These creatures that only Level 8 shooters could handle would surely bring about devastation. Would there be a bloody massacre? Or would humanity itself go extinct?

The answers all lie within this giant.

Duo Ka turned his fighter and dived into the forest in pursuit.

An excellent shooter would not lose their target easily. They would rely on their parapsychic sense to locate their prey, and not their eyes. Parapsychic sense was harder to fool.

The sudden twist in events led to puzzlement amongst the onlookers.

Ye Chong stared at the ground that grew larger and larger in view. Celest was too fast, almost at its maximum speed. Any carelessness on his part would have heavy consequences.

Ye Chong placed his fingers lightly on the console. His breathing was short, not out of nervousness, but because the evasion techniques earlier had drained a lot from him. However, Ye Chong did not have time to regulate his breathing now. This was truly a terrible situation for him! He had never encountered such a suffocating round of assault. The lasers never stopped coming, and they were all on mark. Ye Chong could not imagine what it would

take to fire so quickly and at such high accuracy. Once, he had thought that only Mu and Shang could do it. Now, he could only marvel at the talents found in this world. In the end, he had to give his all just to keep himself from being shot. He had succumbed into a semi-conscious and half-crazed state, and his hands had moved that much faster.

Now, his mind was concentrating only on the forest. There was no room for further consideration. The blue aircraft had followed him closely from behind.

Ye Chong stopped breathing abruptly. His eyes gleamed as his hands danced across the controls in a blur.

Celest stretched its limbs out midair, bending them slightly as it continued to crash downwards. The mech was about to hit the ground. Duo Ka was anxious. Any aircraft that went shooting down at this speed would definitely be reduced to useless debris. Could it be that this giant be able to withstand the impact?

Just as Dou Ka felt concerned, the giant suddenly slowed down in its trajectory in a seemingly physics defying instant. It was now on level with the treetops. The giant pushed its hands and feet against the branches and extended them again like unwinding springs. It was using the trees to slow down its descent.

Creak crack creak!

The branches gave way as Celest crashed into a tree with a girth that went a few meters across, bringing the tree down with it. The huge tree crashed into the ground, kicking up soil and dust into the air. Seen from above, the giant had seemingly vanished into the dense forest under the cover of dust.

"Do you think you can get away so easily?" Duo Ka thought to himself with a cold smile.

The dense forest was Heaven for a close range mech like Celest. Celest landed its feet heavily into the soft ground and continued

pushing forward, making use of the momentum from its descent. Its body tilted, its left leg extended out straight, and its right leg bent into an arch. The left leg traced a long gash into the earth like a plough.

Finally, a chance to catch his breath. Ye Chong panted heavily. Once he entered the forest, the complicated terrain would be disadvantageous to long range combatants. The branches that crisscrossed irregularly everywhere would make it difficult to aim. If they were to fight in the air in the forest, the canopy leaves would prevent light from entering their battleground.

Suddenly, a blue laser beam shot through the leaves and right through Celest's thigh!

How was that possible? Ye Chong's chest tightened. He immediately made Celest dash forward. Ye Chong felt the threat behind him growing stronger and stronger. Cold sweat ran down his back. He could almost smell death itself. It was too long ago since he had a similar feeling!

The opponent pressured him constantly, suffocating him. So far, he had reacted passively without returning an attack even once.

The terrain had not affected his opponent one bit! Ye Chong felt his calmness slowly gave way. However, he knew that he should not slow down now. If he did, the next blue laser beam might just shot through Celest's throat.

...

In fact, the forest did hinder Duo Ka. The shooter shook his head in dissatisfaction. The complicated terrain made it harder for him to shoot. He had aimed at the giant's throat, but shot its thigh instead. Nevertheless, a shooter will have to be at least above Level 5 to be combat effective in the forest. Lesser shooters would be more severely affected.

Without a fighter aircraft, fighting against a creature as strong as

this giant would be suicidal. The difference strength would be too great. If the first shot missed, the consequences would be deadly.

The forest was not suitable for flight. Besides, the giant had shown how agile it could be. Duo Ke thought it was terrifying that the giant could move so quickly despite its bulky size, even faster than a fighter aircraft.

There was no other option for him. Duo Ka flew his fighter close to the ground, waiting for the right time to attack. As long as he kept close to his target, there will be plenty of opportunities.

...

Stay calm! Stay calm! Ye Chong reminded him repeatedly.

He forced himself to slow down his breathing. It worked. As his breathing slowed down, his mind became calmer. Throughout the whole exercise, his hands never slowed down.

There must a way! Ye Chong told himself. As long as he was calm, he would figure it out.

His rich battle experience allowed him to stay in control despite the imminent threat. His gaze turned clearer.

What was his opponent's strength? Astonishing shooting accuracy and frequency, unhindered by the environment.

But that did not sound right. Ye Chong recalled then something that Huang Baiyi once told him. A mentalist was best suited for a flat and open battleground, since the open space allowed the mentalist to spread his senses further. If that was the case, this forest should be effective against mentalists.

However, why was the shooter able to hit him? The shooter must have very strong parapsychic sense!

Ye Chong realized suddenly that the shooter had hit Celest's thigh. Back when they were fighting in the open, the shooter had always aimed for vulnerable spots such as the throat. Now, it was

the thigh that was hit! Ye Chong concluded then that the forest was making things difficult for the shooter.

Having arrived at this conclusion, Ye Chong felt encouraged. His eyes gleamed brighter, and his mind began to race through possibilities.

...

Duo Ka frowned again. That the giant was able to move easily through the foliage came as no surprise. What made him frown was the fact that it appeared to be experienced in fighting in the forest, taking cover behind the tree branches. Duo Ka could sense the general location of the giant, but it was not enough for him to shoot accurately. Besides, he could not understand how the giant's movements were not affected by the wound on its thigh. Once again, he marvelled at the strength of this creature!

Since accurate shots were out of the picture, Duo Ka decided to try a different strategy.

Wide coverage high explosive grenade attack!

...

Celest's holographic scanning system was highly advanced. This was not something Ye Chong got to enjoy every day. Aside from Mu and Shang, the best holographic scanning system he had ever used was Moon King's. However, Moon King was still slightly inferior compared to the best mechs.

Celest was the culmination of the Research Consortium's best research works, which included its holographic scanning system. It was as good as the holographic scanning systems of the Three Aces from the Three Aristocratic Families, and the result of three decades of research by the Consortium.

This allowed Ye Chong to observe the blue fighter's trajectory clearly.

Suddenly, hundreds of grenades rained down on him.

Ye Chong had a taste of the grenade earlier. They were highly explosive. Celest's diamond shaped shield had been blasted into pieces from just one of them.

However, if it was not a direct hit, Celest would probably remain intact.

With his calmness restored, Ye Chong was now a formidable opponent. He did not panic, His hands moved even faster, but steadier.

As the grenades came down, Celest demonstrated its impeccable evasion techniques once again.

Boom boom boom boom!

The explosions never stopped. Where the giant had been moments ago was now a wreck of blown branches and leaves.

Old Wei watched from afar, and thought the situation odd. He had only met Duo Ka a few times, but the man he knew was not one to kill without mercy.

"Strange," their captain, Re Guming sent the message to his group members. He too noticed that something was not right.

Duo Ka never liked to use the high explosive grenades, since they were low accuracy weapons suitable only for wider coverage. Shooters who strived for accuracy never liked imprecise weapons like these.

Now that Duo Ka had used his high explosive grenades, what could it possibly mean?

It meant that Duo Ka was ready to do anything necessary to kill the giant. Why was that, though? Could there be a story behind this? Re Guming and Old Wei both considered the situation. The other shooters who were watching had also realized something was amiss.

Duo Ka noticed that the giant had left his first attack range, and

immediately shot out another round of grenades.

With one giant fleeing in front and a fighter attacking without reserve from the back, the forest was quickly marked with a long trip of burnt clearing, about 500 meters wide and over seven kilometres long. All the trees in the clearing were burnt to a crisp, and the ground was marred with holes. Such a violent and nonsensical attack left the onlookers confused.

Had Duo Ka gone mad?

Ye Chong piloted Celest through the shower of grenades, slippery as a fish. The attack did not leave any significant damage, only coating Celest with ash.

Ye Chong did not understand why the shooter was so keen on destroying him, but he was now thinking of how to get rid of the shooter.

So far, he had not figured out a way to overcome the shooter's precise aim.

What was the shooter's weakness? The fighter, of course! In fact, while the shooter had given Ye Chong a hard time, the shooter's fighter was the only thing that made him so powerful against Celest.

The aircraft was fast, flying at around Mach 22 to Mach 25 by Ye Chong's estimate, and much faster than Ban Meng's Wood Kite. It was obviously something top of the line. To reach this speed within the atmosphere was extraordinary. Even Celest could only reach up to Mach 30, and that was in outer space. Here within the atmosphere, air friction reduced that maximum speed to about Mach 28. Ye Chong was surprised by the fact that this primitive aircraft packed so much power in it.

Nevertheless, the aircraft's speed could not overcome a weakness of its primitive structure –aircrafts were simply not a very flexible transport. Even compared with average mech models, aircrafts

would be found wanting. They were only suitable for flight within the atmosphere. They obeyed aerodynamic laws, and had only one engine at the tail of the aircraft. Every change in direction had to be achieved with a curved trajectory. Turning around required the aircraft to make a U-turn. The faster the turn, the larger the U-turn must be. These aircrafts could not change directions instantly like mechs can. Since the shooter's parapsychic sense had a limited range, this provided Ye Chong with an opportunity.

If he could make use of this opportunity well, he would be able to escape the opponent's pursuit.

Celest suddenly stepped on a thick branch and fell backwards. As the mech's body became parallel to the ground, its legs pushed strongly and its engines blasted at maximum power. The giant launched backwards like a cannonball.

Ye Chong could see the blue aircraft grazed closely past him from above.

The giant's abrupt move backwards left Duo Ka unprepared. He quickly changed his fighter's trajectory, but he had a feeling that his efforts would not be enough.

He was now beyond shocked by the giant's behavior. He never thought the creature would have such intelligence, to recognize his weakness in such a short time and figure out a countermove. What a scary being!

If this giant was really from Darkniss, then the creatures that resided in that place must be terrifying. Duo Ke felt a chill down his spine.

There was no room for his pride or dignity now. He chose the safest option - ask for help!

Chapter 523: Under Attack IV

The trees around him receded as Ye Chong made his way forward. He did not care to look at the blue fighter above him. He needed full concentration just to avoid running into trees. It was dangerous to fly at high speed in the forest.

Fortunately, he had not run into anything so far.

This was not easy, even for him. After all, one needed to stay completely focused and calm when flying so fast. Any mistakes would cost him dearly.

The onlooking shooters were surprised to receive Duo Ka's call for help. To think that a Level 6 shooter, Yedda City's ace, would ask for help from the mediocre Level 3's and 4's.

Old Wei was taken aback when he got the message, and so was Re Guming.

Nevertheless, as a worthy captain of the group, Re Guming reacted first.

"Get ready for battle! But keep each other safe."

If even a Level 6 shooter cannot kill this creature, then their group of Level 3 and 4 shooters could hardly make a difference. That was what Re Guming believed. However, since Duo Ka had put down his ego and asked for help, it could only mean that Duo Ka had good reason to kill the giant.

There was no time to ask Duo Ka for details, but everyone knew that Duo Ka must think that this was a situation serious enough to call for everyone's cooperation.

Duo Ka had a respectable place in Yedda. Thus, in the next instant, all the fighters stood up and joined the battle.

However, in the short pause when the other shooters were still deciding what to do with Duo Ka's request, Duo Ka had lost track

of the giant through his parapsychic sense.

Celest was moving as fast as it could, racing past the trees like a madman. Even so, running through the forest would always be slower than flying over it.

However, Ye Chong's holographic scanning system allowed Ye Chong to see more around him compared to the other shooters. He could see everything that was happening in the sky around him.

His allowed him to slip past the aircrafts. If the shooters were all as strong as the one in the blue fighter, Ye Chong would have lost his life that day.

Fortunately, the other shooters who joined the fight later were all much weaker compared to the shooter in the blue fighter. The forest had stopped them all from tracking him down.

Ye Chong stepped out of Celest and withdrew the biomech into its dimension keystone. He looked up at the aircrafts that flew past him and jumped headfirst into the river.

He went straight down to the riverbed. "It should be impossible for their parapsychic sense to penetrate the waters, much less when they are flying so fast," thought Ye Chong.

Once he shook off the blue fighter, Ye Chong's extensive experience in escaping allowed him to get out of his predicament.

Down on the riverbed, Ye Chong kept his pulse steady. Holding one's breath was a practice that many combat schools would teach. It was therefore not a challenge for Ye Chong. He could even ride the current and move further downstream.

The overgrowth of seaweed kept his figure hidden as he made his way forward. Once, he saw a huge freshwater creature, but it barely spared a glance at him before swimming away.

When Ye Chong withdrew Celest, the shooters were doomed to failure.

This was because they never thought the giant was actually a machine. They had believed that it was a living organism, despite how ridiculous it seemed to be. Perhaps the idea of the giant being a machine would be even more unbelievable to them.

News of the giant's appearance in Dual Forest spread quickly in Yedda. Duo Ka's battle with the giant was also discussed heatedly. The fact that hundreds of fighters were unable to find the giant in the end left the incident shrouded in mystery.

Many people asked Duo Ka about his thoughts after the encounter, but aside from his look of concern, Duo Ka refused to comment further. The shooters who had helped Duo Ka in the forest were indignant at his silence.

On the other hand, Duo Ka had left Yedda in a rush soon after the fight that day to God-knows-where.

...

Ye Chong returned home on the second day. He had made a wrong turn earlier and had to make a huge roundabout.

Once back home, Ye Chong finally felt safer.

The battle had left a deep impression in him. The shooter in the blue fighter left him shaken. It was good that there not many shooters like that one, or he would be toast.

The thought of that blue fighter gave him a headache. So far, he could not think of an effective way to fight against the blue aircraft. If he had a long range mech, he would be able to take advantage of the mech's mobility, agility, and larger holographic scanning range to overpower the blue aircraft.

Unfortunately, he was a close range mech expert. To win against his opponent, he would have to get close.

Celest, a biomech that could escape detection from holographic scanning systems, could not hide against the shooter's parapsychic sense.

This meant that if Ye Chong was in danger, he would not be able to defend himself. He would not use Celest again for fear of creating another incident like that yesterday. Ye Chong would not count on his luck holding out every time. He decided to not use his mech until he had a solution to this quandary.

Ye Chong's investigation stopped. He had wanted to use an auxiliary mech to study the life forms in Dual Forest, but it seemed that the plan would have to be scrapped. Auxiliary mechs were not designed for combat. If he was engaged in a fight again, he would be completely defenseless.

Ye Chong rested at home for two days before fully recovering, completely unaware of the uproar that the whole affair had caused in the city.

Two days later, when Duo Ka brought 12 Level 6 shooters back with him, Yedda City trembled with excitement. Something was going to happen, and everyone knew it! People quickly pointed out that it was a direct reaction to the giant incident two days ago. The 12 Level 6 shooters were a formidable army! Could the giant held some kind of secret that was worth the effort of 12 Level 6 shooters?

Ye Chong was oblivious to these events.

Once he was fully rested at home, he began to analyze the battle two days ago. The first thought that came to him was that he was too unfamiliar with the local workings. If he had known earlier how strong the shooters here really were, he would have found himself in deep trouble earlier.

However, he was also comforted by how fast Celest was recovering. In just two days, the hole in its thigh had all disappeared without a trace. The battle was a close one, but Celest did not suffer any irreparable damage.

The biomech was much superior than local primitive aircrafts, but Ye Chong found himself completely suppressed by his

opponent that day. It was not a good feeling at all!

However, Ye Chong was also patient. He knew exactly what he had to do now - get to know the in-and-outs of this new world better.

He must investigate with care, or people would notice something was amiss. If that happened, he would never be able to escape.

"Someone's coming," the photon processor in the room alerted him.

Ye Chong quickly directed his attention to the holographic screen, wary of this intruder. He lived in a secluded place, and did not expect any visitors.

On the holographic screen, Kristen dragged Ban Meng by his ear and yelled at him, "Is it here?"

Ban Meng nodded quickly, "It's here, it's here!" He pleaded, "Cousin Sis, please let go of my ear, it's going to fall off."

"Humph, and wouldn't you deserve it! You're the one who was lying, showing off even right in front of me. That's just stupid," Kristen argued with disdain, but she let go of his ear.

Ban Meng mumbled to himself but did not talk back.

Kristen walked to Ye Chong's front door and put her right hand on it. She hesitated for a moment, her expression unreadable.

After a good half a minute, she finally made her decision. She clenched her right hand into a fist and knocked heavily on the door.

After a while, the door opened with Ye Chong behind it. He asked flatly, "What is it?"

Kristen blushed deeply, but could not utter a single word.

"I'm closing the door," Ye Chong announced calmly.

Kristen felt indignant at that. She immediately pushed her chest

forward and declared proudly, "Hey, boy, don't think that you're so cool just because you have a few tricks up your sleeves. You rude b*stard, is that a way to treat a lady?"

Ye Chong said nothing, his hand swinging the door close.

Kristen panicked and quickly put her foot in to stop the door. "Wait, wait, I've something to say!"

"Say it." Ye Chong was unmoved.

"I - I want to be your student," Kristen was blushing red as a tomato now. She seemed encouraged by her confession, and announced loudly, "That's right, I said it. Tell you what, I want to your student. Seeing as you have some good moves there, I've come here to be your student. What do you think? You gonna accept me?"

"No," Ye Chong was ready to close the door for good now.

Kristen panicked again, "Wha - you - you're not accepting me? This pretty lady here is asking for you, and you said no? How can you be so heartless -"

Ye Chong had no patience for this. His hand went for the door again.

"Hey hey hey, wait a sec, I'll give you amapolla wood for teaching fees, how about that?" Kristen sounded anxious.

Ye Chong considered for a moment. Amapolla wood was not valuable to him, not even worth a bunch of ordinary plant specimens. He rejected her, naturally, "It's useless to me."

"How about a million ao?" Kristen could read him easily. She could see what Ye Chong was thinking of just now, and realized that she should switch tactics.

Just as Ye Chong was considering this new offer, she upped her game, "Make it two million ao."

Ye Chong made his decision then, "Deal." He needed money.

Kristen burst into a grin, "Wonderful! Hehe, you should've just told me, I can afford to pay you. And just when I was getting nervous, haha!" Kristen was not exaggerating. As a famous weaponsmith, she did not lack income.

Ye Chong opened the door and let Kristen in.

Ban Meng wanted to follow her in, but the door was shut in front of him.

"Humph, b*stards, both of you," Ban Meng muttered in complaint, but only quietly to himself. He went back alone. Ever since he met the cold and emotionless man, his life made a turn for the worse. This time, he had to bring his cousin sister all the way here, dragged by the ear, and he was not even invited inside.

Ye Chong closed the door and put out his hand, "Pay first."

"For real? Are you a man? I've never seen anyone so blunt," Kristen groaned, but upon seeing Ye Chong's stony expression she conceded, "Alright alright, I'll pay up."

She produced two green cards and handed them to Ye Chong.

Ye Chong accepted them unabashed.

"Hey, now that I'm your student, where will I be staying?" Kristen asked.

"Staying?" Ye Chong threw an odd look at Kristen, "You'll stay at your own house."

"No way, the student has to live with the teacher. How else can I learn from you?" Kristen shook her head in protest, then smiled and said, "Don't worry, I'm not interested in your skinny figure. I'm more into the muscular type."

Kristen looked at Ye Chong up and down suggestively.

Ye Chong ignored her look entirely and said without expression, "You can stay here if you want to, but there are rules."

"What rules?" Kristen asked, curious.

"You will have your own space, but there will be restricted areas." Ye Chong looked serious about it.

"Why?" Kristen asked, intrigued, "You hiding something here? Scared I'll find out about it?"

"Either you agree or you stay elsewhere," Ye Chong said without expression, his voice turning cold.

For some reason, Kristen felt a chill from his response. She mellowed, "Alright alright, I agree, not that I care."

"Then you'll stay there," Ye Chong pointed towards a small house at the edge of his courtyard.

"What, you're asking me to stay there?" Kristen studied the house in disbelief. It was so small that it would accommodate only one person.

Ye Chong did not deign to explain. "Is that a yes or no?"

"I'm staying," Kristen declared with grievance, but Ye Chong was unmoved by her. Before he turned back to his own house, he said, "You're allowed only to move around your house and the courtyard."

"What?!" Kristen looked her own little house and the empty courtyard, and wanted to cry.

Ye Chong returned to his own house and worked on his door. Now, the door can only be opened from inside. If no one was inside, the photon processor will scan if the person outside was Ye Chong, and allow only him to open the door. If the door was forced open, it will trigger a defense system that will blow the intruder to bits.

...

Kristen felt extremely bored.

She never saw Ye Chong come out again after her first day there. Her so-called teacher never left his house. She could not

understand how someone could stay indoors for so long. More importantly, she had been surviving on simple rations all this while.

The place was too secluded. No one was willing to send meals over. Besides, she was ordered to stay in her own space, which was her tiny house and the courtyard. There was nothing she could find here that she could use to cook a proper meal.

On the third day, she could no longer stand it. She went to Ye Chong's door and knocked.

"What is it?" Ye Chong's stony expression appeared through the crack in the door.

Kristen could feel a dam of resentment within her burst open when she exclaimed, "Just what do you think you're doing? I've been living out here alone, what about my meals? F*ck, it's been three days, and I've learnt nothing new, so you tell me, right now, are you going to teach me or not?"

Kristen was practically spitting her words out as she rolled up her sleeves in agitation.

Ye Chong found it a curious request. "Should I be providing you meals?"

Kristen wanted to laugh. She grabbed Ye Chong by the collar and said, "Of course, you think I live on air and sunshine? Let me tell you, you got paid so you need to act responsibly -" She stopped abruptly, caught up with an idea, and blushed.

Even with his collar grabbed by her, Ye Chong was unaffected. He tilted his head in thought, and asked earnestly, "You really think that I should be providing you with meals?"

Kristen was stunned. She spat back, "Of course!"

"I see," Ye Chong replied calmly, "Since this was not part of our initial arrangement, please pay up for your meals."

"You - you -" Kristen pointed at Ye Chong, unable to continue.

Was he in the wrong? Ye Chong did not think so. They had agreed that he would be her teacher, not caregiver.

"Fine, fine by me. I've never seen anyone so greedy. Fine, I'll take care of my own meals. But since I've paid you two million ao, how can you just leave me alone outside?"

"You can come to me if you have questions." Ye Chong's reply could drive her crazy.

After awhile, Kristen calmed herself down and said with a cold smile, "Hehe, I have questions, loads of them, just you see, boy."

Kristen was not joking. She had plenty of questions ever since she saw the laser gun that Ye Chong built. Now, she began to go through them, one by one.

...

Back in Dual Forest, a group of 13 were at where the battle against the giant took place, deep in discussion. They were Duo Ka and the 12 Level 6 shooters he brought with him.

"As you can see, this is where we fought that day," Duo Ka pointed at the forest.

No longer was the place all lush greenery. The ground was full of broken branches and twigs. There were holes in the ground, where the grenades landed. The soil was charred from the explosions.

Everyone in the group looked solemn. They had been suspicious of Duo Ka's narrative, but now that they were here, they believed him.

The fallen trees and broken branches here told them how intense that battle was that day.

They knew how strong Duo Ka was. If the battle escalated to this degree, the giant must be formidable, and if what Duo Ka said was true, it was very worrying indeed.

All the shooters here were combat veterans. They identified the damages caused by the giant with ease.

"Look here," one of the shooters pointed at a huge footprint in the ground. It was imprinted a good 30 centimeters deep.

The other shooters exchanged wary glances.

"The foot size suggests a 10-meter height, alright. Hmm, it must be quite heavy. I'm curious how a bulky creature like that can fly, and move with such agility. It's remarkable." The one speaking was the tracking expert of the group.

They continued to search the forest. The giant left obvious marks in the forest, and this allowed them to follow its tracks easily.

They tried to guess the giant's methods and its intentions.

When they finally reached the river, all traces of the giant were gone.

"It must have flown away from here," the tracker suggested. The group agreed with him. However, it was no easy feat to escape the extensive search by the aircrafts. How did it manage to slip away unnoticed? Why did it choose to fly when it reached this river? Was this a coincidence or was there some other factors at play?

The 13 shooters all had questions of their own.

"Let's not rush things. We should stay in Yedda in the meantime. I think that this giant will re-appear soon enough, and we'll get our answers then. Besides, Du Ka had said that the giant is not a threat to us. Let's treat this as a vacation of sorts," someone in the group, their leader perhaps, offered.

His words relieved the tension in the group. Someone added, "Duo Ka's sponsoring our vacation!"

"Haha!" Everyone laughed.

"Of course!" said Duo Ka warmly.

Chapter 524: The Mysterious Stony Man

"This problem is related to many principles. Firstly, do you understand Herb's Law?"

"No," Kirsten looked lost.

"Then let us begin with Herb's Law ..." Ye Chong did not look impatient. He was a picture of patience and serenity.

For the past few days, Kirsten became absolutely convinced of Ye Chong's abilities. She felt grateful for taking that bold step in asking this young man to be her teacher.

Kirsten had asked about everything she did not understand in the past few days. In fact, they were now still discussing only her first question. She did not imagine that there was no much knowledge involved in just a simple question.

It was on the fourth day that she finally figured out her first question. However, in these four days, Kirsten felt that she was getting more than she hoped for.

There was something she could not understand, however. How did her teacher come to be so knowledgeable at such a young age? Whenever they talked, she felt a deep respect for him. All this knowledge was so mysterious and interesting. It was a fully structured and developed field of knowledge, built upon layers and layers of understanding and discovery.

"Let's stop for today. We're going out to buy something," Ye Chong said plainly.

Kirsten looked up in surprise, "We're buying something?" In the past few days, his teacher had never left his house except to impart his knowledge to her. As long as she did not ask him questions, the man would stay inside his house with the door shut.

"I need samples of common raw materials. Please give me a list of them," Ye Chong said to Kirsten.

"What do you need them for?" Kirsten thought it was a very strange request. As a weaponsmith, she had to understand the properties of basic materials at the beginning of her career. In fact, while there were many materials that were suitable to make weapons, only a few of them were common.

If they wanted samples of all the materials, it would cost quite a sum, and she did not see how it was necessary.

"They're useful." Ye Chong's reply did not convince Kristen, but she also knew that if Ye Chong did not feel like explaining to her, no amount of asking was going to get her anywhere.

"Boy, I have to warn you, this is going to cost you at least a million ao. Think it through," Kristen advised despite herself.

"I see, that's not a problem."

...

After so many days of staying in her tiny house, eating simple rations, Kristen felt wonderful as they finally went outside.

"Say, boy, I didn't get your name yet," Kristen took a side glance at Ye Chong.

"Ye Chong," the man himself replied, his eyes looking straight ahead. It had been too long since he used his real name. All this while, he had been going under fake names. For some reason, Ye Chong felt bitter at the thought, but he quickly composed himself.

"Ye Chong? That's not a bad name," Kristen said, but still teased him a bit, "But it sounds too ordinary."

Ye Chong ignored her.

Kristen was like an eye magnet on the streets. Her clothes were revealing, and her body curved enticingly at the people around her. She carried herself with passion and allure; her red lips moved seductively.

She was tall, almost as tall as Ye Chong.

Unlike Kristen, Ye Chong looked like an ordinary dude. He looked ordinary, wore simply, and perhaps only the sharpest eyes could see the confident ease and calmness in his eyes.

Many of the onlookers looked at her sympathetically, and this made Kristen even more pleased. She turned back at Ye Chong but found that he was not looking at her. This angered her.

"Boy, you have a woman?" Kristen suddenly thought of the question and asked him.

Ye Chong considered it for a moment before replying, "I guess so." An image of a woman in white training garb came to mind.

Kristen was instantly hooked on the topic. She continued with excitement, "Wow and wow, didn't think you have it in you. Your skinny ass got you a woman? But I gotta say, you're being too irresponsible, what do you mean by 'I guess so'? You either have one, or you don't, you don't 'guess' okay? What a loser, no wonder I don't fancy you."

Ye Chong darted a glance at Kristen, thinking about how she get along swimmingly with Shang.

Kristen glared at Ye Chong, her arms akimbo, "What're you staring at, am I wrong? I hate men who're careless like you!" Her furious expression made her look even more stunning. Some of the onlookers around them wished they could interfere and lend her a helping hand.

Ye Chong remained stony and expressionless, so Kristen lost interest in the subject. Suddenly, she thought of something else. She approached Ye Chong and whispered in his ear, "Honestly though, what's it like?" She asked and wiggled her eyebrows meaningfully.

"It was good," Ye Chong replied without thinking. The memories he had of "tasting" Rui Bing were carved deep into his mind.

"Hahahaha!" Kristen gave up her ladylike image and laughed

loudly, doubling over with one hand on her stomach. She did not realize that Ye Chong was not talking about what she meant.

Ye Chong did not feel embarrassed. He only found it strange - was it really that funny? Why could he not appreciate the joke?

Ye Chong watched Kristen calmly, waiting for her to finish laughing.

Thus, a strange scene presented itself on the streets. A woman in revealing overalls was laughing beside herself, while a man stood in front her emotionlessly, watching her.

Everyone who walked pass them stared in bafflement.

Fortunately, no one interfered to "help" Kristen. Most of the people here knew her. She was beautiful, true, but she was also bad tempered and an odd character. Moreover, she was a Level 4 shooter. It would make anyone think twice before getting involved with the beautiful lady.

Kristen finally stopped laughing.

"Are you done laughing?" Ye Chong asked calmly, "If you're done, let's keep moving. If not, do continue."

Kristen was speechless at that.

...

Kristen trailed behind Ye Chong, confused by the man in front of her. Sometimes, he was so good tempered that all the teasing would simply roll off him, like he was made of stone. Other times, he felt so dangerous that even minor things could get him worked up.

You never knew what his next step would be. Kristen was confident of her looks, and knew that many were seduced by her beauty. However, this man here had always looked at her with such clear eyes. His expression was always so flat and calm, as though nothing in the world held his interest.

A man at his age should be passionate, ambitious and eager to please. However, this man did not look anything like that.

Kristen can call him "boy", tease him all she wanted, and he would never mind. She remembered clearly of a teacher she had once who always ordered her to be respectful at all times.

This was a strange man. Everything about him was a mystery to her. He was much more knowledgeable than his age suggested, and Kristen suspected that he was probably the most skilled weaponsmith in the world.

Currently, the man had made a very strange request. Such a skilled weaponsmith was willing to spend a million ao to buy all kinds of raw materials. Was he just bored out of his mind? He was also such a money-grubber, or at least as far as Kristen could see.

"We're here," Kristen pointed to a light green colored building, "It's the largest material store here. You can't get everything in the list, but you should be able to get most of them."

Ye Chong nodded, "Alright."

The shop was spacious inside. They sold all kinds of raw materials, and would even buy them from customers. Many shooters would sell their haul here in the shop.

"Welcome, Miss Kristen!" The storekeeper saw that it was Kristen, and came to greet her. Kristen was a famous local weaponsmith, and her weapons were popular around. She was an important customer of the store.

Kristen nodded in greeting to the storekeeper. Suddenly, she slapped her head lightly in annoyance and said to Ye Chong, "Ah, I forgot that this is Mr Mo's shop. We could've just visited him directly. Hehe, I think you must have left quite an impression in him last time."

The storekeeper was surprised. Kristen was a huge customer in the store, but he never knew that she knew the boss himself.

Besides, from what she was saying, it seemed that this man beside her also knew Mr Mo. This made him wary.

"Oh, so it's Mr Mo's store," Ye Chong nodded in recognition. It was just a short peek, but Mr Mo had left a good impression in him.

Ye Chong studied the inside of the store. There were not many people around, but one of them got his attention.

It was a woman in thin, white clothing. She wore a strange hat that had a thin veil covering her face. What caught Ye Chong's attention was not her clothing, but her aura.

It reminded him of someone he had not spent only a brief time with - Huang Baiyi.

One was an old man, the other a young lady, but they shared a certain kind of aura.

The woman seemed to notice his gaze, and turned her head over slightly.

In the next instant, Ye Chong felt a kind of wave go through him. This felt very familiar! In his time with Huang Baiyi, the man had wanted to pass down his knowledge to Ye Chong. To do this, he had demonstrated many ways mental waves can be used. Huang Baiyi was surprised to find that Ye Chong, despite his lack of talent in becoming a mentalist, was very sensitive to mental waves.

It was later that he realized something - Ye Chong was not sensitive to mental waves in particular, but to every detail in his surroundings. This sensitivity he displayed was off the charts compared to normal people. It was what allowed him to notice even metal waves, something that normal people could not detect.

Ye Chong did not like the feeling - it was like he was being scrutinized without permission.

He twisted his upper body slightly to the left and right, and got free of the mental waves. He had achieved nothing through his

meditation training, but it allowed him to be familiar with mentalist powers. Getting free of the mental waves was no challenge at all. A lot of things are like this - when you do not understand it, you may feel that it is full of mystery, but once you realize what it really is, you will find that it is really nothing special.

"Huh?" It was a faint gasp of surprise.

Ye Chong heard it, however. As suspected, it was her. Ye Chong's expression did not change, but he was now more vigilant.

"This is the list. We need 50 grams of each," Kristen and the storekeeper did not notice Ye Chong's interaction with the woman in the corner.

The storekeeper was disappointed when he heard they only wanted 50 grams, but when he saw the entire list, he was simply speechless.

After a long while, he managed to compose himself again. "Forgive me, Ms Kristen, but do you really want everything on this list?"

"Yes," Kristen replied after looking to Ye Chong and did not see him opposing.

The storekeeper handled the business professionally. He did not inquire further into their reasons for buying those materials, but instead said, "Of all the items in your list, our store can directly supply 3,112 of them. There are another 424 which we do not have in stock at the moment. If you're amenable to it, we can acquire the items from other stores for you, but it will take longer, about a week's time. Do you need these 424 items?"

Kristen looked at Ye Chong again, and saw him nod. She replied, "Yes, all of them."

The storekeeper saw both times when Kristen looked to Ye Chong, and felt even more cautious of them. Not only did this man

knew his boss, even the wild and intractable Kristen was obeying him. Who was this man? He did not the answer to that question, but he did know that this was a man he could not afford to displease.

"Since there are many high value items in your list, the price is a bit high. The total is 1.7 million ao. As you are our honored customer, you will receive a discount of 20 percent as per our store's policy. The total after discount is 1.36 ao," the storekeeper explained to Kristen after checking his calculations.

Ye Chong paid straight away. The storekeeper was pleased with the huge transaction. He said, "Since there are many items in your list, we will package and label them in detail. Your items will be delivered to you this evening. The remaining 424 items will be delivered in a week's time."

Even Kristen was not unaffected by the huge 1.36 million ao trade they had just made. She cursed Ye Chong inwardly for being such so wasteful. However, when she looked at the man she called a money-grubber, his expression was simply serene, as though he felt nothing at all.

There was nothing left to do here, so Kristen and Ye Chong turned to leave.

"Please wait," a soft female voice spoke from behind them.

No one saw the cold gleam that flashed in Ye Chong's eyes right then.

Chapter 525: This Woman Is Up To No Good

Kristen turned in response, and saw the veiled woman in white. Her graceful body curves were visible through the thin fabric of her clothes.

"I heard that Ms Kristen is the best weaponsmith around here. I'd like to purchase a weapon from you," the woman bowed slightly in greeting.

Kristen fixed her eyes on the woman, looking her up and down passionately. "I say, to think that I would meet someone as beautiful as you are! How may I address you, dear?"

Standing beside them, the storekeeper felt goose bumps all over when he saw the look in Kristen's eyes. He thought of the rumors about Kristen and felt like warning his lady customer, but he said nothing in the end.

The woman in white smiled, "I am Shu Mo'er."

"You're so gentle, Miss Mo'er, no wonder I like you," Kristen held Shu Mo'er hands eagerly.

Shu Mo'er was uncomfortable with Kristen's enthusiasm, caressing her hands like that. She felt her body turn rigid.

"Aha, is that so?" Shu Mo'er replied awkwardly.

"It's true! You feel just like a long lost friend," Kristen held her hands even tighter.

"Haha, you have a way with words, Ms Kristen," Shu Mo'er pulled her hands back as she said.

Kristen put her arm over Shu Mo'er shoulders like it was the only natural thing to do, "Haha, Sister Mo'er, don't call me Ms Kristen like I'm some stranger. Just Kristen, or Sister Kristen."

Shu Mo'er hesitated for a moment, then nodded, "I will."

"What kind of weapon do you want, Mo'er? Just pick one from

my place, I'll show you everything I have," Kristen offered generously as she lightly pinched the other woman's shoulders teasingly.

Ye Chong was certain by now that Kristen would get along splendidly with Shang. For the moment, he chose to play a silent part. He did not know why the woman in white looked unsettled, but this might just be the perfect chance to understand her more.

Shu Mo'er bowed slightly, saying, "I'll be most grateful, Sister Kristen," as she slipped out of Kristen's embrace easily. Kristen smiled sweetly with her tantalizing red lips, "Sister Mo'er, won't you show me what you look like now?"

Ye Chong silently approved of Kristen's methods.

Shu Mo'er hesitated, but soon replied, "The veil is for convenience of travelling, please forgive me, Sister." She took off her hat and showed her face.

She had an oval face. Her skin was smooth and tender, her eyes shining black. Her delicate nose was matched with small lips. Long hair reached her shoulders. She looked graceful and serene. As Shu Mo'er lifted her veil, the store went silent in awe.

"You're so beautiful, sister, even I can't help but adore you," Kristen's eyes sharpened as she said this. She licked her moist lips, an act which was also appreciated by the other customers in the store.

Ye Chong was unmoved by all that. He did not know this woman's background, but her strength was enough to make him wary. Besides, since this woman had tried to probe him, and now greeted them, Ye Chong could only think that she must be up to no good.

"Please forgive me," Shu Mo'er apologized to Ye Chong and Kristen as she put on her hat. Her face was once again veiled, but anyone who had seen her face would never forget its beauty.

Since her arms were hidden behind her long sleeves, Ye Chong could not make out how strong she really was.

"And how should I address you, sir?" Her soft voice was like a refreshing sprinkle in spring.

"Ye Chong," he replied with a precise and strong voice that erased all traces of her graceful demeanor.

Shu Mo'er smiled almost imperceptibly at him.

"What kind of weapon are you looking for, sister?" Kristen asked enthusiastically.

"Um, I haven't quite decided, do you have a suggestion, sister?"

Ye Chong smiled coldly inside. This was obviously a pointless conversation. What kind of combatant would not know their weapon of choice? This woman was up to no good.

Kristen had not thought about that. She considered the question for a moment, one hand on her chin, "Hmm, your weapon must not be too heavy, or it'll just be a drag. It must be powerful enough, else your pretty self gets into trouble if you lose. You have a tiny frame, so the weapon shouldn't be too long."

After a long while, Kristen could not think of anything suitable. She said, "Sister, why don't you come over to my place? You can pick and choose from there."

"You have my thanks," Shu Mo'er answered with a thin smile.

Kristen put one arm on her waist and waved off her thanks with her other arm, "Don't worry about it, you're just my kind of girl, sister."

Ye Chong felt his body shudder for no reason.

The three of them left the store together.

"Come, sis, let's go to my place," Kristen invited her warmly.

Shu Mo'er answered softly through her veil, "I thank you very

much, sister."

Kristen smiled teasingly at her, "You're too courteous, sister." She turned to Ye Chong and said, "You can head back first, tea – I'll be back after Sister Mo'er here chose her weapon."

"Okay," Ye Chong said briskly and turned to leave.

"Will Mr Ye not join us?" Shu Mo'er asked in surprise.

Kristen groaned, "He's just a dull guy, more like an eyesore if he comes with us. He's like a rock."

Shu Mo'er smiled, "Mr Ye is a very interesting man."

"Interesting?" Kristen scoffed, "That guy can't say anything worth noticing."

Ye Chong walked along the streets, thinking of Shu Mo'er. He must be careful of her, that was for sure. The woman had something up her sleeves, perhaps because he had gotten her attention by escaping from her mental probing. Ye Chong did not know how strong she really was, but she must be pretty strong. It was this gut feeling, and his dangerous battle days ago that made him even more vigilant.

There was not much he could deduce of Shu Mo'er. They had only met briefly. He quickly moved on from the topic to another – that of money. Now that he had spent 1.36 million ao in one go, he still had about another million left.

Ye Chong knew that he had zero sense in financial management. His research work was going to cost a lot. Without an income source, he would be broke very soon. He did not want to worry about money again. There must be some kind of solution out there. However, he did not know what it could be, as he simply did not know much about finance in general.

What a dilemma! He would have to take his time and figure out something.

Suddenly, Ye Chong began to move to the side, into a corner.

It was a narrow alley, but deep and very quiet.

Ye Chong walked to the end of the alley and turned around. He asked calmly, "Who are you?"

There were two men, one tall and the other short, with guns in their hands. They were surprised that Ye Chong noticed them following him. However, they quickly composed themselves.

The shorter guy laughed, "Hehe, bro, you can only blame yourself for being careless. Tsk tsk, I say, you don't look like it, but that's some money you got in your account. Just hand it over."

The taller one glared fiercely at Ye Chong, looking wary. His gun was pointed at him.

Ye Chong felt like rolling his eyes. To think that he would be robbed like this! Shang would definitely have a field day once he found out.

Ye Chong had no intention of wasting time with these two. Skilled shooters were powerful, but these two here did not even merit his attention. Ye Chong leapt like a spring, launching himself into the air.

When a shooter fought against a combat expert one-on-one, the shooter did not have any significant advantage. A shooter may be able to predict their opponent's moves with parapsychic sense, but they could not react as fast as a combat expert. As a Jie expert, Ye Chong himself was even faster. In the short time before a shooter could fire their gun, a combat expert could do all kinds of damage. Combat experts were the true masters of close range combat. A combat expert with excellent mental training would be even more powerful.

To these two shooters, the man in front of them seemed to have just vanished into thin air.

Ye Chong spread his arms wide like a pelican. He appeared

suddenly between the two men and reached out with his hands towards their throats.

Just a light twist in his hands, and the two men would die.

Suddenly, Ye Chong showed hesitation! A strong mental wave had reached him.

Ye Chong attacked, breaking the necks of the two robbers with a crack. He bent down low and slid backwards, then sprang up with his toes like a cat and got onto the wall. He took a quick glance at the alley before turning around and began to run.

It was only then that the two corpses slumped to the ground.

A man with bushy eyebrows appeared in the alley. He was just in time to see the bodies collapse and the figure that made its escape.

The man looked unsettled. He dashed towards the two bodies. His face twisted when he saw the unnatural twists of their necks.

...

Ye Chong got home, still shaken from the incident. This world was too simply dangerous. Having met two very strong people in just a single day, Ye Chong was shocked! Could this world be full of so many strong people? The world felt more and more threatening to Ye Chong.

He had thought that people on level with the blue fighter's pilot must be rare enough. To think he actually met two today who were just like the pilot! Today's events told him that the mentalists in this world were far more powerful than those in the free space zone.

What a terrifying place!

Ye Chong had been to many places, but his strength had always kept him safe, be it in the Five Galaxies, He Yue Galaxy or the free space zone. This world, however, had put him in a dangerous position.

It did not feel good to be forced to lie low.

The items from the store arrived soon after. Ye Chong decided to stop thinking about the problem for the moment. Here, the only person who could help him was himself. He was confident of finding a solution to his predicament. He had survived harsher times. His determination was honed long enough to withstand the challenges around him.

The items filled up his courtyard.

The store was meticulous, having labelled every one of them.

Ye Chong wasted no more time. He began to do his research. He needed to analyze all the materials here. It would be a huge project – huge in the sense that there were many items to go through. However, since Ye Chong had very advanced equipment at his disposal, the real analysis work should not take him too long.

Now, all he needed to do was create a database of information for all these materials.

Ye Chong worked with full concentration. In this state, his mind was like a speedy processor. He soon discovered that most of the materials here had high energy content. It was like the natural ingredients here could absorb the rich energy around them.

When it came to the semi-transparent crystal that locals used as their energy source, Ye Chong could not withhold his surprise any longer. The crystalline body was pure, with an enormous energy density. Ye Chong had never seen anything that could store so much energy aside from the teardrop mineralite.

From the receipt, Ye Chong noticed that the crystal itself did not cost a lot. This meant that the crystal was a commonly found material here. What a blessed human world! Energy was a necessity for all human societies. They had plenty of them here.

Using this crystal as an energy source could boost the engine power greatly. Ye Chong finally had a glimpse of why the primitive

aircrafts here could fly so fast. With this wonderful power source, and incredibly light but strong wood material, it was no wonder the aircrafts here were so fast. The wood materials were even lighter than the skeletons that Ye Chong used!

This place was so blessed with natural resources that it was really unfair!

Ye Chong looked at the big piles of materials in his courtyard with excitement. Who knew what other surprises awaited him there?

For the moment, however, he would have to stop working, since Kristen had come back.

Kristen was back, alone. Ye Chong did not ask her about Shu Mo'er. However, seeing Kristen looking a little dreamy did make him a little curious.

...

Shu Mo'er was feeling happy today, having met someone quite interesting. She had thought that a small city like Yedda would just be boring, but it seemed that there were still people of note here.

That the man could escape her parapsychic sense so easily told her how powerful he was. Besides, she was interested in particular with his methods. The man had a cold expression, but Shu Mo'er thought he looked cute.

As for the overfamiliar Sister Kristen, Shu Mo'er squirmed a little when she thought of her.

She was surprised to find that the man who seemed to be younger than Kristen was actually her teacher. When she asked Kristen further about Ye Chong, she could not believe who he really was. In the end, however, she believed the woman. She could tell that underneath Kristen's affected indifference was a sincere respect for him.

When she found out that Ye Chong had used speckled blue fir

wood to make a laser gun for Level 8 shooter Sha Ya, a gun that could shoot through five centimeters of nubis stone, Shu Mo'er thought that her heart could burst with intrigue.

Sha Ya was a name that she was familiar with. Both she and her teacher knew the shooter.

This man had built such a powerful weapon for a Level 8 shooter at a young age, and even had his own mysterious powers. No matter how she looked at it, Shu Mo'er felt that she had gained plenty today.

Beneath her veil, Shu Mo'er smiled very softly. She had already arranged for a visit to Kristen's little house.

Shu Mo'er returned to her lodgings. She opened the door and found a bearded man sprawled out lazily on the sofa in the living room. He had a bottle in one hand, and he looked drunk.

"Edward, you're too lazy. There's such a nice weather outside, the air is refreshing as well," Shu Mo'er commented, displeased, as she wrinkled her nose in response to the alcohol smell in the air.

Edwards took a side glance at Shu Mo'er and broke into a grin, "Our lil' Mo'er is back. How's it going? Do anything fun today?"

"I met an interesting person," Shu Mo'er said with a smile. She took off her hat, revealing her charming features.

Edward took a gulp from his bottle and burped. He muttered, "Interesting? Even an ant will be interesting to you."

"Edward!" Shu Mo'er chided him with a glare. Edward quickly laughed it off, "Lil Mo'er, Duo Ka and the rest are in the study, go find them."

"Humph!" Shu Mo'er pouted and fixed him with another angry glare before she stomped off to the study.

Chapter 526: Pressure

Duo Ka's study was large. It could host a dozen people and still felt spacious. Currently, there were about seven people in there. Some were sipping tea; a few were chatting quietly in small groups; some were resting their eyes; some were already asleep, and even snoring a little.

"Lil' Mo'er is back." This came from Duo Ka, the owner of the house.

"I'm back," Shu Mo'er nodded obediently. She was adored by everyone here. They would all offer the beautiful and kind young lady their utmost attention and generosity.

However, do not be fooled by her innocent looks. She was not shabby at all, qualifying herself as a Level 6 shooter at a very young age. This showed how talented and hardworking she was. Besides, she had more combat experience than many shooters of her age, and that was quite rare.

"Did you enjoy yourself today, Mo'er?" Wei Zheng asked. His age was closest to Shu Mo'er compared to that of the rest in the group. At 24, only 4 years older than Shu Mo'er, he was also considered a genius shooter.

Shu Mo'er did not like Wei Sheng for some reason. Logically speaking, Wei Zheng was remarkable in both his looks and heritage. Wei Zheng came from an aristocratic family. He was a well-bred young man who would always have a mesmerizing smile on his face. He conducted himself gracefully in a pleasing manner. Besides, as an heir of the Xi Ding Tribe bloodline, he was absolutely handsome. After all, the Xi Ding Tribe was known for their men's good looks.

Many women would have thought of Wei Zheng as their dream partner, but Shu Mo'er was an exception. If Wei Zheng was not as skilled as he was, or part of the group, she would not have cared to

tolerate his presence. Even the drunkard Edward was better company than Wei Zheng.

However, Wei Zheng seemed to treat Shu Mo'er with exceptional interest, and that was a bother to Shu Mo'er. The man had asked to accompany her on her trip today, and Shu Mo'er had spent a long time convincing him to stay behind.

She did not feel comfortable talking to him, but Shu Mo'er still answered him obediently, "Yes, I did. Thank you, Brother Wei."

Wei Zheng smiled handsomely, "That's wonderful."

"What did you do today, Mo'er? I see that you're quite happy," Duo Ka asked with interest.

The subject of her outing today filled her with excitement, "Uncle Duo Ka, Mo'er met a very interesting person today!"

Duo Ka looked at her with complete adoration. He asked with a smile, "What could possibly make our Mo'er so excited?"

"Haha, maybe our Mo'er has met the man of her dreams," the joke came from Peng Acha, the oldest in the group. The man had a drunkard's nose, and his hair grew uncontrollably like a wild bush. He often behaved like a child, and liked to make jokes.

Wei Zheng still had a smile on his face, but his eyes widened meaningfully at the joke.

Shu Mo'er quickly explained herself, "No, that's not it! I met a very skilled weaponsmith today. He's built a weapon for a Level 8 shooter before."

"Oh, so Yedda has someone like that?" The rest of the group who were resting had all sat up by now. They were curious of this news.

Duo Ka frowned, "That's impossible, I would have heard of it if there's someone like that. If you're talking about a skilled weaponsmith, the only one around is probably a woman called Kristen. However, skilled as she is, even she was not good enough

to make a weapon for a Level 8 shooter."

Shu Mo'er smiled, pleased of herself, "Hehe, I've met that Kristen today too. She's the weaponsmith's student." Shu Mo'er's expression turned a little odd at the mention of Kristen. That woman was a little scary!

Wei Zheng caught her look. For some reason, his eyes turned colder, but his smile was even wider.

Duo Ka was surprised. "Kristen's teacher? I've never heard of that. If it is Kristen's teacher, then I suppose it's quite possible."

Shu Mo'er teased them, "By the way, you all know this Level 8 shooter."

"Who is it?" Peng Acha asked, curious.

Shu Mo'er declared victoriously, "Sha Ya. You all know her. It was said that she exchanged a piece of amapolla wood for the weapon. I heard that it was a laser gun that could shoot through five centimeters of nubis stone."

Everyone was riled up by the revelation. "Five centimeters of nubis stone? Amazing!"

Shu Mo'er felt even more pleased of herself, as if she was the one who made the laser gun. "You wouldn't have guessed what the gun's made of."

"What is it made of? It is wood from the star birch tree? Or nightmist fir?" Peng Acha asked, intrigued.

"Hehe, you're wrong!" Shu Mo'er was close to Peng Acha. She smiled teasingly, "I knew you couldn't guess it. I was very surprised when I found out. The laser gun was made of the most common material – speckled blue fir wood."

"Impossible!" A few of them broke out simultaneously.

The ones who still looked sleepy moments ago were now wide awake. They exchanged looks of concern. It was surprising news,

indeed. It was unheard of for a weapon made of speckled blue fir wood to shoot through five centimeters of nubis stone.

"Lil' Mo'er, bring to that person now! Hah, I must get me one of those!" Peng Acha's eyes were practically shining. He was eager to visit the mysterious weaponsmith immediately.

Shu Mo'er looked hesitant, "Peng Peng, that man's weird. I couldn't even get through to him. Besides, Sha Ya had traded amapolla wood for her laser gun. What do you have to trade?"

Peng Acha was crestfallen, "Nothing. Amapolla wood can only be found in the inner parts of Darkniss. This old friend of yours isn't capable of entering that dangerous place."

"Be patient, Peng Peng, I'm also trying to figure out a way. Since we're going to here for a while, let's take our time and come up with a plan," Shu Mo'er consoled the older man.

The rest of the group went silent. Amapolla wood and the like could only be found in the hands of Level 8 shooters. They were all only at Level 6, a large gap of strength from Level 8.

Just then, someone rushed into the study. It was a man with bushy eyebrows.

"Naver, what is it?" Zong Wen asked. He was the group's leader. Zong Wen had a thin face and a pair of keen eyes. He was 40 this year, the prime age for shooters. Naver was usually more reserved and composed, but his panicky look today alerted Zong Wen.

Everyone directed their attention to Naver.

Naver raised his eyebrows in agitation as he explained, "I met someone."

"Who was it?" Zong Wen asked, concerned. Naver would not be surprised by just anyone. Who amongst them did not have an enemy or two? Could Naver have encountered one of his enemies?

"I was walking around the streets today when I sensed that

someone was being robbed close by. I headed towards that direction, but saw something shocking. A single person had killed the two robbers," Naver spoke in a low voice. His expression was grim.

Peng Acha smiled at the man, "I say, Nav, you're just overreacting. What's so surprising about one person killing two robbers? If it was me, humph, even seven or eight will be a piece of cake."

Everyone else looked to Naver in confusion. Peng Acha had voiced their question out loud.

Naver shook his head and elaborated, "It's not uncommon for one person to be able to kill two robbers, but what if he did it with his bare hands?"

"His bare hands?" Everyone turned concerned.

Naver nodded, "Yes! The robbers had a laser gun each."

Now that shut the rest of group up. How many of them in the group could stand against two robbers unarmed? Soon, everyone concluded that it would be impossible for the man to fight the two robbers with his bare hands unless the robbers were not shooters themselves.

"The two robbers were shooters. One is Level 3, the other's Level 4," Naver added, thus eliminating even that possibility.

"That's impossible. Even a Level 8 shooter can fight against two armed shooters with their bare hands," Wei Zheng said sceptically.

Naver inhaled deeply before he continued, "I saw it myself! They were fighting just in range of my parapsychic sense."

The rest in the group believed him then. They knew that while the eyes could be fooled, their parapsychic sense could not. Besides, this calm Level 6 shooter's parapsychic sense was definitely trustworthy.

"That man was callous. He only attacked once, twisting the necks of the two robbers. I inspected the two bodies, and found that their throats were completely destroyed!"

Naver's low voice sounded like it came from a dream, delivering a shocking piece of news to all of them.

The study was quiet and heavy with tension. Each of them was considering their odds against this terrifying man.

Naver looked up at his group mates, and smiled bitterly, "I have come to realize that if I were to face the man one on one, I will definitely lose."

His words shocked the rest of the group.

Zong Wen forced a smile and said, "Don't underestimate yourself like that. You're a Level 6 shooter. If your words got out, those who don't know us might think that we're just a bunch of useless thugs."

Zong Wen's words were encouraging to his group members. It was true that they had all qualified themselves as Level 6 shooters. That set them apart from the rest.

Naver looked even bitter as he said, "I said that because when the man made his move, my parapsychic sense could not pick him up at all, much less lock on to him."

"How's that possible?" Now, even the calm Zong Wen was shaken. The rest of the group too looked alarmed.

Seeing everyone's reaction made Naver calmer, for some reason. He elaborated, "It's true. He moved fast, like lightning. I couldn't sense him clearly. He seemed to notice my parapsychic reach. From the moment he made his move, my parapsychic sense lost track of him."

He looked like he was reliving the moment as he said, "I had never seen anyone move so fast, so deftly before. His hands are strong, being able to crush the throats of the two robbers in just

one attack. The robbers never had time to shoot. He was simply too fast. Besides, he was able to jump up a wall three meters tall without any assisting device, just his legs. I had thought I was watching some kind of fox or something."

"Did you see his face?" Zong Wen asked.

Naver shook his head in reply, "No, only a shadow."

When Naver was finished, everyone went into deep thought. In just a single day, they had come across two very strong people. Could this small city of Yedda actually be harboring so many masters of their art?

...

Ye Chong ignored Kristen, who was behaving lifelessly. He had much to do. He had just finished inspecting some of the materials that he had used before. He now understood the properties of commonly found materials like the speckled blue fir wood. This was all thanks to the high end gadgets from the Research Consortium. The equipment was all highly advanced. Some were even unheard of in public. The Research Consortium's secretly built devices were now benefiting Ye Chong.

Ye Chong had a solid foundation in weapon making, especially when it came to the underlying principles of the weapons themselves. He had the elders in Aurora to thank for this knowledge. It was why he was able to adapt to these new materials quickly and easily.

The defensive weapons that he built earlier were crude since he was not familiar with the materials. Now that Ye Chong had a better understanding of the materials, he decided to modify those weapons accordingly.

...

He took out all the weapons that were hidden in the courtyard.

Kristen stared at him with her mouth wide open. She was

absolutely flabbergasted!

What was he trying to do?

She never knew that this seemingly empty courtyard was hiding so many deadly weapons! The corners of the courtyard and the edges of the walls were all hiding weapons. Even more extreme was a stone block at the center of the courtyard that could be slid to the side, revealing beneath it a cannon array that consisted of 49 large-caliber photon cannon barrels. There were no less than five of these cannon arrays in the courtyard.

Kristen was shaken. All this firepower was enough to arm a military outpost.

When Ye Chong began to dismantle these terrifying weapons right in front of Kristen naturally as though it was only part of his daily routine, Kristen felt that she could go mad right there and then!

No, the one who was mad was this man! This man was the real crazy!

Kristen was also chilled by her observation of Ye Chong. The man looked entirely peaceful and calm when he was modifying the weapons. He did not look like he handling dangerous materials, but only doing something very ordinary, like sipping his tea. Besides, he worked swiftly with familiar moves. It was obvious that he was experienced in the business. Kristen swallowed heavily.

When Kristen saw Ye Chong sitting on a large cannon that could bring down a fighter with a single shot, munching his lunch, she finally fainted.

The last thought she had before she blacked out was how crazy her world had become!

Chapter 527: Paying the Price

It took Ye Chong three days to finish modifying his entire defense system. In those three days, Kristen watched how Ye Chong disassemble and reassemble the cannon barrels with ease. Her initial fear had now dwindled down to normalcy. By the third day, she began to lend Ye Chong a hand.

The heavyweight firepower was an eye-opener to her. As a person who was dedicated to the art of weapon making, the power of the cannon arrays made her realize just how insignificant her earlier works were! Kristen had always been inclined towards violence. When she got over her initial shock, she began to study the small but powerful weapons.

However, the complicated structure soon overwhelmed her. She knew that her own knowledge was only some of the basics of whatever education system that Ye Chong subscribed to. It was too early for her to study these cannons, but this did not stop her from admiring them. If Ye Chong was not there to stop her, she would have loved to take a few shots with those babies and see if they were really as powerful as Ye Chong claimed.

There was something else that was curious about these weapons. They could not be controlled with parapsychic sense. How then should the user aim? Ye Chong offered no explanation on this part.

The truth was, Ye Chong was too lazy to explain. It would take at least days for him to help her understand. Right now, he was short of time and could not afford to spend time on helping her.

Three days later, his work was finished. All the cannons were hidden once again, leaving no traces of their presence in the courtyard. Kristen was infinitely impressed by this.

Just then, Ye Chong received an alert from the photon processor in his house. Someone was approaching them. Ye Chong entered his house quietly and shut the door. He activated the holographic

screen and saw a man and a woman approaching him. Ye Chong recognized the woman as Shu Mo'er. The man, however, was a stranger to him.

What were they here for? Ye Chong frowned.

He came out of his house and shut the door.

A knock came from the door.

Kristne went to open it, and he heard her voice of joyful surprise, "Sister Mo'er, come in, come in."

Shu Mo're smiled warmly, "Sister Kristen, I'm here to visit."

Kristen giggled happily, "You finally turned up, I've been waiting for days."

Ye Chong watched them coldly from the side. He was more convinced than ever that this Shu Mo'er had ulterior motives. His eyes glistened coldly as he watched from behind Kristen.

The two of them entered the courtyard. Shu Mo'er greeted Ye Chong, "Good day to you, Mr Ye Chong."

"Good day to you," Ye Chong returned the gesture. He may not believe that such superficial gestures were necessary, but he was also no longer the greenhorn he once was. His past experiences allowed him to become long familiar with these kinds of tactics.

Shu Mo'er did not wear her veil today. Her flawless countenance was presented to everyone around her. Just a short glance at her face was enough to make people notice her graceful presence.

"This is my friend, Wei Zheng," Shu Mo're made the introductions. Ever since she found out from Kristen of Ye Chong's address, she began to plan her visit. However, Wei Zheng had insisted on going with her. Zong Wen was concerned about her safety, especially because of Naver's encounter with that mysterious person. Everyone felt that their safety was threatened, and agreed that Wei Zheng should accompany Shu Mo'er. Shu

Mo'er did not want to reject Wei Zheng openly, so she agreed.

"How do you do," Wei Zheng smiled in greeting to Ye Chong. Ye Chong caught the fleeting hostility in the man's eyes.

As expected, they were up to something. Ye Chong reminded himself to be alert. He decided to act without reserve should a fight become inevitable later.

Kristen whistled and gave Wei Zheng a flirtatious look. She smiled teasingly and said, "Hey there, handsome!" Wei Zheng did a double take on her, but greeted Kristen graciously.

"Are you inviting us in?" Shu Mo'er asked Kristen with a smile.

Kristen replied with another one of her mesmerizing smiles, "Oh, you're wrong about that, sister. I'm not the master of the house." She was not stupid. Ye Chong had warned her to never enter the house without his permission, or suffer the consequences. Earlier, she did not fully appreciate his meaning. However, the past few days of seeing all those cannons were like a refresher course to mind her conduct.

Her teacher, this expressionless man of stone, was not as harmless as he seemed to be. Beneath his emotionless shell of an exterior was an intense will to kill.

If she was not allowed to enter the house, how could she expect the visitors to be given exception? Thus, she passed the request to Ye Chong.

The three of them looked at Ye Chong expectantly.

Ye Chong replied with his stony face, "I'm sorry, the house is not ready for guests."

No one expected him to reject them. This was an extremely arrogant and rude attitude towards his guests.

The atmosphere in the courtyard turned heavy with awkwardness.

Shu Mo'er looked shaken. Wei Zheng looked worse. They had never been treated like this before. As Level 6 shooters, anyone who met them would offer their utmost respect.

Kristen never thought that Ye Chong would reject them so quickly and decisively. She wanted to say something, but Ye Chong's cold look at her made her swallow her words.

Ye Chong was not interested in socialising with them. He did not know these two people. Besides, he had never like people who came to him with hidden motives. Moreover, the equipment and life specimens in the house would surely kick up a riot if these two saw them.

Wei Zheng had a huge ego, and he could not stomach Ye Chong's outright rejection.

He asked gravely, "What do you mean?" Shu Mo'er kept quiet.

Ye Chong looked straight into Wei Zheng's eyes and said, "Did you not understand me?"

Wei Zheng stared back at Ye Chong, looking seriously offended.

Ye Chong's expression was calm. His whole body's muscles were relaxed, but ready to move at the slightest provocation! No one would suspect the terrifying strength he had in his slight figure.

Shu Mo'er was already prepared to interfere from the side. However, she did not plan to help Wei Zheng, but to separate the two of them should they fight. If they killed a weaponsmith just because they were denied entrance, their reputation would be tarnished. Shu Mo'er knew that Wei Zheng was not as easy-going as his smile often suggested.

Wei Zheng's eyes gleamed. Just when everyone thought he was about to attack, he suddenly laughed, "Haha, Mr Ye is a man of character. Since Mr Ye is not free today, we'll come visit another time. Farewell."

Wei Zheng went out the door. Shu Mo'er fixed Ye Chong with a

long, meaningful glance before going out as well.

Kristen groaned in anguish and studied Ye Chong for a moment. She said, surprised, "Didn't think you had it in you, boy. You should know that they're both Level 6 shooters. You're doomed if you fight them head on!"

"Oh," Ye Chong replied with disinterest, but did not argue with her. Words would achieve nothing. The fact was, when Wei Zheng locked onto him with his parapsychic sense, he was confident of breaking free and defeating both the shooters. However, he did not do that, but chose to restrain himself. He did not know how strong a Level 6 shooter was. He only knew that the woman called Sha Ya was a Level 8 shooter. Thus, a Level 6 shooter should not be a problem to him.

Nonetheless, the man's strong parapsychic sense came as a surprise.

The look in Wei Zheng's eyes told Ye Chong that this thing between them would not end so easily. Ye Chong was not afraid of trouble. It did not matter how strong his opponent was.

"They're here to help Duo Ka. Rumor has it that it's because of the 10-meter tall giant in black armor that appeared in Dual Forest. Even with hundreds of fighters, the giant could not be caught. Strong, right? I don't know what kind of crazy thought Duo Ka had, but he went to get a bunch of Level 6 shooters. There are 13 of them now, including Duo Ka. What a team! They're waiting for the giant to re-appear, so they're mostly idle right now," Kristen whistled through her tantalizing lips.

"I see," Ye Chong finally found out who the pilot behind the blue fighter was. So it was Yedda's ace, the Level 6 shooter Duo Ka. He finally understood how strong a Level 6 shooter could be. His horrible experience with the blue aircraft was still fresh in his mind.

If 13 aircrafts of that calibre were to join forces and fight him,

escape would not be easy.

"Now you know," Kristen mocked, "Hehe, I'm curious if you're really hiding something in there that no one should find out. Now my dear Lil' Mo'er and the handsome Wei are both gone, don't you feel sorry them?" Kristen affected a look of pity.

Ye Chong ignored Kristen's drama acting. He was thinking about Celest. He must not use the bio-mech here again, it would be too dangerous.

...

Night came. Ye Chong was organizing his files. Results from the daytime's analysis were out. These were the last batch of numbers. He needed to organize the data first. Kristen had already gone to sleep. The morning's incident had drained her.

Suddenly, an alarm sounded – "Intruder alert."

Intruder? Ye Chong had his suspicions.

He activated the holographic screen and saw Wei Zheng on it.

Wei Zheng had gave some excuse to slip outdoors. He still could not let go of the morning's humiliation. His pride could not accept that unjustified treatment! Shu Mo'er and he had both kept the incident at the courtyard a secret from the rest in the group.

If they caused trouble and were found out, people would think they were bullying the weak. Their image would be tarnished.

What if they were not found out, though? Wei Zheng laughed coldly inside, his handsome face looking a touch menacing. Shu Mo'er had shut herself in her room, still bothered the incident. What use was that? The d*mned man was probably still pleased at himself for rejecting them both.

The thought of that wretched man's expressionless face made Wei Zheng even angrier.

He quickly headed towards Ye Chong's courtyard. His strong

parapsychic sense allowed him to avoid the dangers around him. He wanted to know what that man was trying to hide in his house. Perhaps there would be some ultimate weapon, and wouldn't that be a gift to him?

If the man found him out ... Wei Zheng's eyes flashed with killing intent. Some things had to be done.

...

Ye Chong was speechless. Wei Zheng's movements looked like some amateur's act. Ye Chong could not understand it. Stealing or robbing required skills, and a man of Wei Zheng's level should not have even bothered with this dangerous attempt.

Ye Chong looked at the holographic screen with cold eyes. He had made his decision.

If it was earlier in the day, Ye Chong might be worried about his comrade joining the fight. However, since the man had opted to enter his place at night, the man definitely deserved what he was about to give next.

A few dark holes appeared in the thick walls surrounding the courtyard.

Wei Zheng was still about two kilometres from the courtyard. Since this was near Dual Forest, there were no people around. Hence, he had simply moved without concealing himself.

What could a weaponsmith possibly do? He was a Level 6 shooter! Wei Zheng was conceited in this respect.

Suddenly, he felt a threat coming towards him.

He stopped running and spread his parapsychic sense further out.

His expression twisted as he stumbled backwards quickly.

A laser beam, thick as a finger, shot a deep hole into the ground where he was standing earlier.

An ambush! He finally demonstrated his abilities as a Level 6 shooter, taking out his laser gun and sensing his surroundings with his parapsychic sense. He was furious. The day had been hard on him. He had met a despicable man in the morning, and now had to face an ambush at night.

However, he did not lose his calm despite his anger. In fact, he was very collected right now. With the laser gun in hand, he would shoot the moment his parapsychic sense informed of anything suspicious.

How dare they ambush him! Were they looking to die faster?

Huh, there was nothing around him! His parapsychic sense picked up no presence of life around him, much less an ambusher.

...

Ye Chong watched how Wei Zheng stepped backwards to avoid his attack, and felt more impressed by the man.

Nonetheless, he was not ready to stop attacking just yet. His defensive system was now finally serviceable. This was an excellent opportunity to test it out.

...

Another laser beam set Wei Zheng stumbling to the side again to avoid the shot. Wei Zheng was almost bursting with anger by now. He still could not locate the ambusher.

Had his parapsychic sense been stretched to maximum range, he would not have been able to avoid those two attacks.

Wei Zheng hid himself carefully behind a large tree and studied his surroundings. The rash impulse within him dissipated, replaced by extreme care.

His first thought was, could a Level 8 shooter be ambushing him?

Ignoring the fact that there were no Level 8 shooters in the city, a Level 8 shooter would not have missed the first two shots.

However, how could he not detect this shooter's presence?

Could the man's house be home to a Level 8 shooter? Wei Zheng was stunned by the realization. If that was true, it would explain why the man refused their entrance. Wei Zheng was still aware of how inferior he was compared to a Level 8.

He was beginning to regret his mission. This was going nowhere. Nonetheless, he was grateful for being alive. If he could still avoid the ambusher's attacks, then perhaps the ambusher did not want him dead. It seemed that he should be prepared to suffer tonight, but his life would not be endangered.

Unlike Wei Zheng's interpretation of events, Ye Chong had attacked without reserve. Wei Zheng was able to avoid both attacks due to his own abilities.

If Ye Chong's defence system had only two shooting stations, he would only be able to make Wei Zheng suffer, but not truly endanger his life.

However, what were the odds that Ye Chong had only two shooting stations?

Five straight laser beams shot across the air.

Wei Zheng felt them the moment they left the guns. This time, he was terrified! Five simultaneous shots! This must be a Level 8 shooter! The stronger a shooter was, the higher the shooting frequency. A Level 8 shooter can make continuous shots feel like they were shot at the same time. This increased their firing range and power, and made it harder to avoid.

Wei Zheng was proud, but he was also capable. He quickly raised his gun to his chest to block the attacks!

The laser gun flashed in a brilliant white. The other four laser beams graced pass his figure and burrowed into the ground.

Wei Zheng was sweating all over. His laser gun, made of blackthread wood, had a thumb sized hole on it. It felt hot to the

touch.

Was this a test? Wei Zheng felt uncertain. He was absolutely terrified. Of the five laser beams that were shot, four were used to block his escape routes, and the final one to hit him directly. If he had tried to avoid the final shot, he would have been hit by one of the other beams.

If he had not thought of using his own gun to block the final shot, he would be dead by now.

Ye Chong was greatly surprised by Wei Zheng's performance. Even he himself would not be able to avoid all five laser beams without a bit of luck. This shooter had managed to hold out for so long, and he was only a Level 6 shooter! What if he was a Level 8? Shooters were truly terrifying!

Ye Chong mused as he activated a few other shooting stations.

In fact, Ye Chong wanted to test his cannon arrays. That kind of wide range attack would be perfect for a long range combat loser like Ye Chong. However, since the attack would cause quite a ruckus, he decided to abandon that tempting option.

With 12 laser beams attacking him all at once, Wei Zheng finally felt like giving up! In that moment, he could only think of how much he regretted coming here!

Fwoosh fwoosh fwoosh!

Seven laser beams hit him, leaving seven bloody wounds. One of them was right on top of his heart. Poor Wei Zheng, a Level 6 shooter, had died without knowing who had attacked him.

When Ye Chong arrived at Wei Zheng's location, the man was already dead.

Ye Chong considered the situation for a moment, then lifted Wei Zheng's body and vanished into Dual Forest. Two hours later, he returned. The body was already destroyed, leaving no traces behind.

Ye Chong had first returned to his house and came out with a bottle full of liquid. He bent down to Wei Zheng's body and put a small and prickly grayish green seed on it. He then emptied the liquid in the bottle on the seed.

Soon after, grayish green vines began to sprout. They grew quickly and soon blended into the forest background. All traces of the body were covered by the plant. The grayish green vines of the plant blended in with the other plants, an effectively camouflage of the plant itself.

This was a fast growing plant borne from the Research Consortium's studies. It was originally designed to rapidly transform the soil composition in arid or harsh environments, such as the desert. The liquid in the bottle was a growth catalyst for the plant.

Done for the day, Ye Chong returned quietly to his house.

All the items had been analyzed, and Ye Chong had also finished with assembling the information into a database. Aside from the 400 over rare plant specimens that still had not arrived, Ye Chong was basically done for now.

After some consideration, he deposited all his equipment into Celest's dimension keystone.

Chapter 528: One Against Three

When Shu Mo'er got up from bed, it was nearly midday. She had gone to sleep unsettled the night before. When she got up, she found everyone in the group looked concerned.

She went to Pang Acha and asked, "Peng Peng, what's the matter with everyone?"

Pang Acha replied lowly, "That boy Wei Zheng went out last night and hasn't come back since. We're just a little worried."

"Ah," Shu Mo'er gasped, "He hasn't returned?"

"Yea, Naver and Duo Ka are out to find him. They'll be back soon," said Peng Acha, worried.

For some reason, the expressionless man who had kept her awake last night came to Shu Mo'er's mind ... She had a bad feeling about the whole thing.

Just then, Naver and Duo Ka came back. They looked unsettled. Peng Acha approached to ask, but Naver shook his head, indicating that they did not find anything.

"Wei Zheng is capable. We should not worry about it too much, perhaps he'll come back some time later," Zong Wen comforted his group members.

They thought to themselves, "That's right, Wei Zheng is a Level 6 shooter. How could he get into trouble in this small town?"

They felt better after that.

Shu Mo'er quietly pulled Peng Acha to the side and whispered to him, "Peng Peng, come with me later, I'm heading somewhere."

Peng Acha tilted his head, curious. "Where? Don't go around wondering at this time, what if something happens to you?"

"I've got business, okay? Please come with me. Besides, what could possibly happen when you're with me? We can ask

Blackbrow there to come with us." Naver's eyebrows were thick and dark, and they earned him a nickname.

Peng Acha considered her request, then rubbed his nose and agreed uneasily, 'Alright alright, sigh, you and your business.'

Naver was also easy-doing with the young woman, so he agreed as well.

"Lil' Mo'er, where are we going?" Along the way, Peng Acha looked around him and kept asking Shu Mo'er about their destination.

Shu Mo'er was helpless against the old man's enthusiasm, "You'll know when we reach there."

"Is it related to Wei Zheng?" The silent Naver finally spoke up.

Shu Mo'er hesitated for a moment before nodding in reply, "Yes."

Peng Acha was scandalized, "What? Lil Mo'er, you should've told us earlier! We could've brought a few more with us!"

Shu Mo'er shook her head and said, "I wasn't sure. It's just a gut feeling. Best not to involve the others before we're certain."

The trio picked up their pace.

"It's here," Shu Mo'er said, pointing towards a huge residence.

Ye Chong had noticed their arrival the moment they entered the range of his defence system. He sighed to himself, "They all come, in the end."

A knock came from the door, then he heard Kristen's cry of excitement, "Sister Mo'er!"

Ye Chong came out of his house and watch Shu Mo'er and her companions enter his courtyard.

Shu Mo'er greeted Ye Chong, "Mr Ye."

"Ms Shu Mo'er," Ye Chong nodded in reply.

The man looked calm. Shu Mo'er could not see anything wrong

with him. She was now even more uncertain of her suspicions. Still, she asked, "Mr Ye, have you seen my companion who came with me yesterday? We're looking for him."

"Your companion yesterday? Mr Wei Zheng, yes?" Ye Chong shook his head, "Didn't he leave with you?"

If Shang were here, he would commend Ye Chong's calm performance.

Ye Chong's reply was a disappointment to Mo Shu'er. The man's eyes were clear and honest. She was mostly convinced by his words.

She turned to Kristen. Kristen asked, surprised, "What is it? Sister Mo'er, did something happen to that handsome man?" She did not seem to be faking it. Kristen was unaware of everything that happened last night. Her reply convinced Shu Mo'er that Ye Chong was not lying.

Shu Mo'er broke into a smile and said, "It's nothing. He went out last night but didn't come back yet, we're just worried."

Peng Acha was studying his surroundings the moment he crossed the door, looking around the empty courtyard. Naver said not a word, his eyes focused on Ye Chong.

Shu Mo'er looked at the closed door behind Ye Chong and felt tempted. She asked with a smile, "Mr Ye, perhaps you might be open to let us visit your weapons workshop today?"

The house was empty inside. Ye Chong had stored away everything in Celest's ring. However, Ye Chong realized what a big mistake it was. No weaponsmith's workshop would be empty. That emptiness itself was something unusual.

"I'm sorry, it's still not convenient today." Ye Chong declined outright, just like yesterday.

Naver and Peng Acha exchanged a look, then split up and walked to separate sides, forming a triangle with Shu Mo'er.

"I've been thinking, Mr Ye, we admire your skills, so why won't you let us visit your workshop?" Naver asked, looking Ye Chong straight in the eyes. Naver thought he looked familiar, but could not figure out why. Nonetheless, the sense of danger that came from the man had drawn his attention.

Ye Chong acted as though he did not see their tactical positions. He replied calmly, "I'm not used to it." His breathing had begun to slow down. Underneath his cloths, his muscles were gradually relaxing, so that he would be prepared for any sudden movements.

"Can't you make an exception?" Naver's hand was reaching for the laser gun on his waist. He did not speak loudly, but he sounded suspicious and threatening.

Peng Acha and Shu Mio'er did not know why Naver insisted, but they followed his lead and stayed vigilant. Never may be a taciturn person, but he was treated business seriously, and had his comrades' trust.

"Apologies," Ye Chong offered simply.

Naver finally reacted, in part due to Ye Chong's obstinacy, but also because he now knew why the man looked so familiar.

That silhouette! It was the same one he had seen in the alley that day!

Naver's eyes widened. His right hand reached for his laser gun. Ye Chong's cruelty had left a deep impression in him. A shooter's instinctive reaction when threatened was to reach for their weapons.

Naver never realized that his reflex was a crucial and dangerous mistake.

Peng Acha and Shu Mo'er saw his reaction, as they were also paying attention to him. Naver's reaction was a signal for them – a signal for battle!

It was a signal for Ye Chong – a signal that meant his opponents

were starting a fight!

Both sides moved almost simultaneously. Ye Chong and Peng Acha did so without hesitation. Both of them were battle veterans, and trusted their own judgments.

Ye Chong directed power into his relaxed muscles. He disappeared from view in a flash.

Parapsychic sense!

Ye Chong felt it abruptly, stopped moving towards Naver. He leapt backwards just as a red laser beam grazed past his chest.

Peng Acha had saved Naver in the nick of time.

Naver quickly got on with what he was doing. He cursed his own foolishness for being distracted. He did not attack Ye Chong immediately, but pulled out his laser gun and fired towards the sky.

Boom! A dazzling and colourful beacon exploded in the sky. This was a distress signal for the group. Everyone would receive the signal immediately. After Naver recognized who Ye Chong really was, he realized that the situation had become much more serious than they thought.

Of course Ye Chong understood the significance of the beacon. However, he was busy holding off Peng Acha. As the eldest in the group, he was also the most experienced. His parapsychic sense held onto Ye Chong tenaciously. Ye Chong tried to break free of it a few times, but it always found him back.

Ye Chong dared not stay in the same spot for too long. He knew that shooters could aim at him with their parapsychic sense and shoot him. Hence, he needed to avoid being locked on by their parapsychic sense.

He moved so quickly that he looked like a shimmering apparition. Avoiding the parapsychic waves from locking onto him was possible due to how they worked. Parapsychic waves come

from the person using it. By moving very quickly, Ye Chong disrupted the parapsychic waves around him, making the feedback to the user too complicated to decipher.

This meant that he had to be constantly moving to be free of the shooters' parapsychic sense. This was not too difficult for him. He could control his muscles freely. No one else could manipulate bodily energy like he could.

Peng Acha was a combat veteran. He did not panic when he saw that Ye Chong could break free of his parapsychic sense. Instead, he made the right choice of ramping up his parapsychic waves.

In some sense, parapsychic waves were like water waves. As Peng Acha strengthened his own parapsychic waves, the analogous water would become denser, making it harder for Ye Chong's motion to disrupt the waves.

Ye Chong instantly upgraded the man's threat level.

There was no choice but to move faster himself. Ye Chong leapt around like a shadow, never touching the ground longer than necessary.

Peng Acha countered accordingly. His parapsychic sense may not be able to help him aim, but he could still fire based on experience. The laser beams were more dangerous to Ye Chong than Peng Acha's parapsychic sense. The laser beams almost hit him a few times.

Shu Mo'er cried out anxiously, "Mr Ye, we only want to have a look, nothing more. Why don't you meet us halfway, don't make this difficult for both of us." Kristen quickly ran into her own house. Level 6 shooters were not her specialty. More importantly, she was shocked to find Ye Chong holding out against three Level 6 shooters. He was strong!

"Looks like I've hit the jackpot!" Kristen muttered to herself, excited for the discovery.

"If this continued on, I'll be forced into a passive role," Ye Chong thought to himself.

His eyes gleamed. He always had a good grasp of the bigger picture.

Ye Chong dived forwards and pushed with his feet. He slid towards Naver, staying close to the ground.

Shot after shot followed Ye Chong, leaving a neat row of holes behind him.

Ye Chong watched the as the lasers lit up again and again behind him. Still, he pushed forward, determined. He narrowed his eyes, seeing the thick and thin lines dancing in his vision, and the dim and bright spots.

His Jie expert's skill – lines and dots that herald death.

Now!

Ye Chong suddenly sprang up from the ground, his hand gripped into a sharp fist. His target was the brightest spot in view – Naver's throat.

If he was on target, the man would be dead for sure.

Ye Chong's sudden movement surprised everyone else, even Naver himself.

Ye Chong's sudden appearance before him left him stupefied.

The world seemed to slow down. Naver could see everything in front of him clearly. He could even make out every single hair on Ye Chong's face, and his dark eyes that shined with killing intent and apathy.

It was a strange experience. After his initial shock, Naver felt like he was an onlooker to the scene. There was no joy or grief, only peace. His own movements were so slow compared to his attacker's. A simple thought came to his mind -

"Ah, so it's possible for a human to move so fast."

Ye Chong attacked steadily and precisely. Just as his fist was about to meet Naver's throat, he felt danger closing in on him – parapsychic sense! Abruptly, his upper body arched backwards as made a backward flip with his figure.

A laser beam shot through the space right between Ye Chong and Naver. It was Shu Mo'er to the rescue. She looked pale, biting down her lip as she pointed her laser gun at the two of them.

Just when the three shooters thought that they were out of danger, Ye Chong once again demonstrated his terrifying strength.

His body was still in midair when Ye Chong twisted his body like a boneless piece of flesh. His legs seemed to expand and contract against all logic. He then directed his legs towards Naver's chest.

Wham!

It was like the sound of a drum. Naver cried out in pain, flying backwards and hitting himself against the wall behind him. He coughed out blood, spraying it onto the wall like bizarre art.

"Blackbrow!" Shu Mo'er cried out in despair. She never imagined that her suggestion would take such a devastating turn.

Ye Chong folded his legs back in a little and immediately pushed himself sideways when his feet touched the ground. Another laser beam shot past him.

Ye Chong traced Z's on the ground, the footwork designed for evasion. He never stopped moving his upper body as well, vibrating like a shadowy presence.

Peng Acha was no longer all laughs and jokes. He was now very calm. He understood that his objective now was not to kill the enemy, but to protect the injured Naver and shaken Shu Mo'er until Zong Wen and the group arrived.

However, just as he began to switch tactics, Ye Chong noticed it as well.

He had extraordinary sensitivity when it came to battles.

Since the enemy went on defensive, his target now was Shu Mo'er. The beautiful young woman looked devastated and pale, which was simply pitiful.

However, her opponent was Ye Chong, a man of war who did not know pity.

Ye Chong moved even faster. Since the battle began, Ye Chong had never once stopped moving, and he had never slowed down.

He had been moving around every corner of the courtyard. No one could predict where he would go to next. They could only play catch up with his shadow.

What terrifying stamina! What terrifying speed! However, the most terrifying thing about him was his cold and calm heart!

No opening or opportunity escaped him. It was as though he was born for battle.

Ye Chong rushed towards Shu Mo'er. He was now executing high speed veers. This was the first advanced move that he had learned in mech piloting. It was derived from the Non-orderly Wavy Leap. Ye Chong had always been able to show remarkable power and endurance in combat. The harmless veers turned deadly in his hands.

Shu Mo'er stared blankly with her eyes wide open. She was still trying to accept that Naver could be dead. All of this was because of her. She felt deeply guilty and regretful.

"Mo'er!" Peng Acha was terrified. He released shot after shot carelessly, hoping to stop the scary and cold man for as long as he could.

Pwoosh! Ye Chong's left shoulder was shot. The attacker's careless shots had wider coverage, and made it more possible to hit his target. However, the shooter would also lose his attacking rhythm this way. This was dangerous for the shooter. Hence,

shooters would normally avoid shooting without aiming unless necessary.

Ye Chong did not slow down from the pain on his shoulder. His eyes flashed, and he suddenly made another veer.

Ye Chong took 13 steps along a curved trajectory. His sudden change in direction made Peng Acha miss his target. Fwish fwish fwish! The ground was covered in holes.

Ye Chong moved quickly. He closed in onto Peng Acha, now only half a meter from his left. Since Peng Acha had been shooting without aiming, he had lost his shooter's rhythm. This created a spot of vulnerability in him.

To Ye Chong, Peng Acha was now like a castle without its guards.

Chapter 529: Opportunity

D*mn! Parapsyhic waves again! This one felt entirely different from the three in his courtyard. Ye Chong understood immediately that they were from their backup.

Ye Chong leapt forward, breaking free of the parapsychic waves and at the same time delivering a punch to Peng Acha. Peng Acha reacted immediately, letting go of the laser gun in his hand and raising both arms up to block Ye Chong's attack.

However, he did not know how much power was packed in Ye Chong's fist.

Ye Chong's fist landed straight onto Peng Acha's crossed arms - or rather, Peng Acha managed to block Ye Chong's fist. Both Edward, whose presence Ye Chong noticed, and Peng Acha were thankful for the block.

However, Ye Chong's attack was so powerful that Peng Acha's arms crumbled easily under the impact. The effect brought to mind a single word – obliteration. No one could ignore the pain from suffering broken bones in both arms. Peng Acha screamed in pain as he was pushed backwards from the attack, and subsequently blacked out.

Ye Chong felt helpless. These shooters were all very strong - he was stopped every time he tried to kill one of them. Nonetheless, two of the shooters had lost their battle capacity. Now, his opponents were their reinforcements.

There were 13 shooters in total. Wei Zheng was dead, and two were heavily injured. Shu Mo'er was still out of it, and he only needed to stay vigilant around her. This meant that he was left with 9 shooters.

A group of 9 Level 6 shooters was a formidable force. Ye Chong could fight evenly against three of them in the courtyard just now

because they were all close to him. In short range exchanges, Ye Chong's powerful moves were effective even against combat experts, much less the weaker constitutions of these shooters.

Now, however, Ye Chong had lost this advantage.

One by one, new and distinct parapsychic waves enveloped Ye Chong.

Ye Chong retreated backwards quickly. He saw five of the shooters on the wall surrounding his courtyard, surrounding him. They had laser guns in their hands, and were giving him looks of hatred.

There should be 9 of them, not five! Ye Chong did not know where the other four were, but he knew that everyone in the group was here now. He could sense the nine distinct parapsychic waves around him.

Dozens of laser beams shot towards him from all directions.

Zong Wen's expression was grim. The opponent was very strong. Their timely interference was the only reason their three comrades were not dead by now. What a strong enemy!

Aside from the wound on his left shoulder, the man seemed unscathed. This man was not a shooter, but his strength had made them all wary. He did not seem human at all, moving even faster than an animal. He was also very strong, hurting Peng Acha like that. How could any human possess this amount of strength?

Zong Wen's eyes scanned towards Peng Acha, lying unconscious at a corner. Bones protruded out of his arms, bringing a chill down Zong Wen's spine, despite his long experience with violence.

On the other hand, the man could sense their parapsychic waves. Zong Wen shook his head inside. He had to continually reassess the threat level of this man. Every time he thought he understood his opponent's abilities, the man would surprise him again with something extraordinary.

He could not lock on to the man with his parapsychic sense at all. This came as a shock to Zong Wen. Shooters were strong because of their parapsychic sense. If their parapsychic sense failed, they would lose their greatest advantage.

Ye Chong moved, fast as lightning.

He dared not slow down even the slightest bit, for fear of being locked on by their parapsychic sense. Ye Chong knew that the next shot that hit him would definitely be fatal. No, there may be more than one shot. Sha Ya's demonstration of continuous shots had left a deep impression in Ye Chong.

Laser beams came down onto the courtyard like a heavy shower. Ye Chong once again surprised his opponents by twisting and turning at physically impossible angles. His body parts were so flexible that he could execute all the physically impossible moves almost easily.

It was an eerie sight, watching a man avoiding the laser beams that rained down him. The shooters who rarely missed now found themselves a target who continued to slip through their attacks.

Gradually, the shooters felt a chill blossoming in their hearts. This man was so mysterious and unpredictable! The afterimages in his wake made him look like a spirit that came from Hell.

Ye Chong was having a rough time. He was now rendered passive, and could not get close to his enemies. That put him at a heavy disadvantage.

Ye Chong was never used to staying on the defence for long. He searched for a plan to retaliate.

He pushed down with his right hand and rolled to his left, curling into himself as he did and reached for the dagger by his thigh. Daggers were always Ye Chong's favorite choice of weapons. The one he usually had on him was given to Ban Meng, but this one was made using the Research Consortium's equipment. He got his

metal alloy material from disassembling a mech's part.

Ye Chong aimed at Zong Wen. He did not recognize the man, but felt that he was the leader of the group.

Zong Wen realized something was wrong the moment Ye Chong threw out his dagger. Zong Wen's parapsychic sense informed him of the dagger, which also alerted his comrades.

None of them sensed any parapsychic waves before the dagger was thrown. They found it hard to believe that there were still long range weapons in this world that did not rely on parapsychic aiming.

Ye Chong had attacked by aiming with his eye, throwing the dagger with his hand, and deciding the strength of the throw by experience. None of the three relied on parapsychic abilities, so he managed to surprise the shooters.

Zong Wen reacted quickly – he aimed his laser gun at the incoming dagger and fired.

The dagger was fast, but not as fast as parapsychic reaction.

The laser beam hit the dagger in midair, creating a brilliant spark.

The laser beam itself did not have significant momentum. It caused damage through the high energy intensity, melting or evaporating its target.

However, melting or evaporating a solid dagger in a short time was not easily achievable. Dozens of shots could only chip off a small part of the dagger. This was because the dagger was made of metal alloy from a mech part, which had highly defensive properties by design.

Zong Wen's comrades realized the issue. They quickly focused their laser beams at the dagger.

Ye Chong finally witnessed the incredible accuracy that Level 6

shooters were capable of. The laser beam shower in the courtyard disappeared as they all converged onto a spot in the air. None of the beams were off target.

Ye Chong was in awe. Even in He Yue Galaxy, it would be very hard to find a mech pilot who could aim and shoot so well. In this world, shooters of this calibre seemed to be everywhere.

The dagger had bought precious time for Ye Chong. He felt all the pressure on him relieved. His plan had worked. Ye Chong's eyes gleamed with a coldness that could rival the severest winters.

Ye Chong stood up straight and did not move.

He inhaled deeply, expanding his chest like a balloon, and activated his throat muscles.

"Roar!"

Mortal Roar! This was the September Lan Family's special technique. A powerful sound wave exploded outwards from Ye Chong in all directions.

The sound wave disrupted the air around him. The shooters were all very sensitive to their surroundings. This advantage, however, was now turned against them.

Their parapsychic sense allowed them to notice the powerful sound wave, but they could do nothing as the sound wave interfered with their parapsychic sense. The sound wave was fast, and their laser guns were useless against it.

The five of them screamed in pain. Ye Chong had spent a long while preparing for this attack to ensure that it would disable his opponents in one blow. He had used the dagger to win him a short but very precious amount of time.

Thus, the sound wave was stronger than any that he had created before.

The dagger's handle was still a solid piece, but there were no

more laser beams directed at it. What was left of the dagger drove itself into Zong Wen's collarbone, the sound of bone breaking barely audible through their screams.

Ye Chong panted heavily. The battle had nearly exhausted him. There were still four shooters left, but this did not make Ye Chong panic.

The four shooters in hiding might be affected by his Mortal Roar attack.

He looked around him warily. His left arm hung down loosely. Blood trickled down from the wound along his arm, reached the tip of his now tired fingers and dripped to the ground.

Suddenly, Ye Chong's body went rigid. His calmness was finally shattered.

Two distinct sets of parapsychic waves, much stronger than any he had encountered from the shooter group, were now locked onto him. These two parapsychic waves were so strong they felt almost like solid restrains on him, much stronger even than what the most powerful mentalist Ye Chong had met, Huang Baiyi, could achieve.

Being locked on, Ye Chong did not move a muscle. Doing anything rash now would not be wise.

These are very powerful shooters! Ye Chong's mind raced through possible scenarios. Why would these powerful shooters show up so late into the fight, when their comrades were heavily injured?

Clap! Clap! Clap! A clapping sound reverberated in the empty courtyard.

A group of people entered the courtyard, led by a middle aged man dressed in loose, black clothing. He was tall and lanky, with short hair that shot up rigidly. The man had a cold aura about him. He said with an almost imperceptible smile, "Wonderful,

wonderful, absolutely wonderful."

This middle aged man was flanked by two men, both with laser guns in their hands. One was bald and looked belligerent. The other was a smaller man with keen eyes.

These two were the ones who had locked onto Ye Chong. Their parapsychic waves were strong. Ye Chong studied the people in the group of newcomers, and found a familiar face - Sha Ya.

Sha Ya gave Ye Chong an apologetic look. There was another man beside Sha Ya. He had a callous feeling about him, and a very sharp gaze.

"This is completely unexpected, absolutely unexpected. Sha Ya had said that there's a very skilful weaponsmith around here. I had just planned to drop by out of curiosity, but instead got to witness such a splendid battle. This trip is worth the effort."

The man in black clothes studied Ye Chong with admiration. Ye Chong found the man's gaze uncomfortable. It felt like there was some mixture of condescension in the way the man looked at him.

"Relax, relax, we're not here to start a fight. Oh, by the way, we've handled the four shooters were who hiding themselves."

Ye Chong felt relieved as the parapsychic waves around him vanished. However, he sensed another two almost unnoticeable parapsychic waves probing gently around him. Ye Chong kept this to himself.

"Who are you?" Having recovered a little, Zong Wen asked the leader of the group.

The man gave Zong Wen a look of contempt and said, "You have not earned the right to know my name. However," he took a glance at Ye Chong and continued, "- his presence here benefits you. Looks like this is your lucky day! Well, let me introduce myself. I am Sun Sieha." He ignored Zong Wen entirely and bowed to Ye Chong with a smile on his face.

"Sun Sieha!" Zong Wen gasped, then laughed bitterly, "To think that I could meet with the ace of the Royal Palace. I am indeed lucky. My comrades, the four you mentioned, perhaps you would consider granting them mercy?" Zong Wen was now worried about his four comrades.

"Oh, you mean those four? To be on the safe side, I had them all killed just now," Sun Sieha said with a smile, like it was only some unimportant matter.

Zong Wen vomited blood. This racked up a series of violent cough. Nonetheless, Zong Wen kept his hateful gaze fixed on Sun Sieha.

Sun Sieha was not interested in Zong Wen. His attention was all for Ye Chong.

"You are truly astonishing. No one has ever trained themselves physically to this degree – you are the first in history. I know that no one in this world can top you when it comes to combat. Besides ..." he reached a hand out to Sha Ya, and she quickly passed the laser gun made of speckled blue fir wood to him. Sun Sieha caressed the weapon gently, and said softly, "Besides, you're also a fine weaponsmith. Please allow me to express my admiration of your skills."

He bowed again to Ye Chong.

Ye Chong raised his right finger slightly, like he was about to form a fist with it. His actions were immediately greeted with a warning look from the two men beside Sun Sieha.

Sun Sieha behaved like he did not notice Ye Chong's movements. He said, "Your skills are extraordinary, and I am a man who values talent. You are definitely a talent." He bent down and picked up what was left of the dagger, now a small piece of alloy, and smiled at Ye Chong, "You surprise me, and that is a wonderful feeling to have. This heavy rock can only be found in Darkniss. I'm curious, how did you manage to survive Darkniss alone?"

Ye Chong stayed silent.

Sun Sieha did not mind it. He continued with all smiles, "Of course, all of that doesn't matter. What matters is, I need your strength. Power, status, money, these are all within your reach if I just said the word," Sun Sieha said persuasively, "Together with us, you'll find that all your life before this moment was only a waste of time. People will now kneel to you in respect. They will worship you. You can live a life of unimaginable luxury. Those in power will try their best to gain your favor. Women will come to you in droves, if only you wished for it. If you want to continue with your research, that's also fine. The Royal Palace has all kinds of invaluable resources at your disposal. You can pursue any field that you're interested in, and you won't have to worry about the expenditure at all.

"What do you think? Join us!" Sun Sieha looked at Ye Chong with burning desire.

Ye Chong asked calmly, "Why should I join you?"

"Why?" Sun Sieha doubled down in laughter at Ye Chong's reply as though it was the funniest joke he had ever heard. Sha Ya and the rest in the group also gave Ye Chong an odd look. They were baffled to see Ye Chong still not appreciating the reality of his situation.

Ye Chong's calm expression betrayed nothing.

Sun Sieha laughed for almost five minutes before he finally stopped himself. He looked at Ye Chong now with a half-smile, and said almost conversationally, "Why? Hmm, I have to say, you're just cute. Well, there are many reasons. For one, our group is made up of only Level 8 shooters. There can hardly be another team as strong as ours out there. Moreover, I have the Royal Mandamus Order, which gives me the right to command anyone. You have no right to refuse me. Besides, don't forget all the benefits I listed down earlier. It's a good bargain.

"Of course, all those reasons do not matter," Sun Sieha said with a smile, but his eyes had turned cold, "The most important reason is, do you have a choice in this matter?" Sun Sieha was pleased. He enjoyed this feeling of power, compelling others to obey him. He looked at the other man with interest. This was an exchange that he had plenty of experience in. All of them chose to compromise and give in, in the end, and this man would be no exception.

At the same time, two strong parapsychic waves were locked onto the man. The bald man and the smaller man beside Sun Sieha looked prepared to kill if necessary.

"You're wrong," Ye Chong shook his head and said. His cold eyes met Sun Sieha's eyes for the first time. His voice was calm and full of confidence. As he finished his sentence, his right index finger pressed down onto his wrist.

Chapter 530: Agreement

"Defence system activated."

"Targets locked."

A male mechanical voice spoke up in the courtyard, surprising everyone in there. They looked around but could not find the source of the voice.

Abruptly, the courtyard came to life. Ground panels slid open, exposing a hole underneath them.

Crack crack crack! There were sharp sounds of metal parts in motion.

Five strange weapons emerged from the holes before the crowd.

A dozen or more thick cannon barrels rose up slowly from the holes, moving by themselves. They all turned to direct their aim towards Sun Sieha and his people.

Sun Sieha and his people were shocked. They never thought that the courtyard hid such powerful weapons. The cannons were huge and intimidating. No one doubted their destructive power. Besides, they were made by a very skilled weaponsmith. If he could build a laser gun out of speckled blue fir wood that could shoot through five centimeters of nubis stone, then these cannon arrays must be terribly powerful.

The people exchanged looks of horror and surprise. They never thought that there would be military grade weapons here, much less five of them.

The sudden turn of events had shocked everyone. The atmosphere in the courtyard was tense. No one dared to move a muscle. Hell, any one of the cannon arrays here could blast them into kingdom come. Even a Level 8 shooter would be useless against these killing machines.

The courtyard was dead silent. Sun Sieha's face was stuck in an awkward smile. His forehead was covered with beads of sweat.

This calm young man was still not done with surprising his guests.

Swish swish swish! A series of noise surprised Sun Sieha and his people once again. They looked around and felt even more shaken by what they saw.

The walls around them were covered with holes. Each hole had a long and thin cylinder sticking out. As a Level 8 shooter, Sun Sieha immediately recognized them - they were all guns!

Being pointed at by hundreds of guns was terrifying. The pressure would drive people mad.

Even a mosquito would be shot to scraps by these weapons, much less human beings. The weapons had no blind spots in the courtyard. Once the weapons fire, they would all surely all be shot full of holes.

Ye Chong's defence system finally came to good use.

The short man beside Sun Sieha stole a glance at Ye Chong, his face tense under pressure.

Ye Chong said coldly, "It will be best if all of you don't try anything stupid." Everyone obeyed him. The short man looked away from Ye Chong.

Ye Chong did not feel too optimistic about his situation. He knew that the apparent advantage that he gained did not exactly put things in his favor.

Level 8 shooters would not be easily manipulated by other people. If they were forced to fight for their lives, Ye Chong would be in serious trouble.

Nevertheless, it felt good to be on the same level as his opponents. When Ye Chong was fighting against the Level 6

shooters, he had wanted to activate his defence system. However, since they were all standing on the walls, Ye Chong decided not to.

Ye Chong sat down unceremoniously on the ground. His stamina was exhausted, and he was injured. He needed to rest. He knew that Sun Sieha, as a smart man himself, would not do anything irrational at this point.

Once he understood his situation, Sun Sieha composed himself. He looked at Ye Chong, sitting on the ground, and said in a relaxed manner, "As expected, you are a man of surprises. Even I am impressed by this. I believe that we can start negotiating on even ground now." He was implying that Ye Chong was now qualified to speak with him as equals.

"Are you a member of the Royal Family?" Ye Chong suddenly looked up and asked Sun Sieha.

"I am," Sun Sieha answered proudly. He took a glance at Ye Chong and asked, "Could you be interested in the Sieha Family?"

"What other countries are there besides this one?" Ye Chong ignored his question.

Ye Chong's question surprised Sun Sieha. He did not expect the other man to be in the mood to discuss these irrelevant subjects. However, this was exactly what he hoped for – someone who could surprise his enemies. Sun Sieha had already begun to think of Ye Chong as his subordinate. Only through conversation could he understand this man even more.

"Well, there are three main countries. Aside from the Sieha Family's Eastern Cloud, the other two are Western Frost and Southern Land. As for the smaller countries, there are many of them, more than a dozen," Sun Sieha gave a brief overview.

This was Ye Chong's first time knowing more about the society at large on this planet.

Ye Chong looked straight at Sun Sieha and asked, "What is your

position in the Royal Family?"

Sun Sieha was surprised by the question, but answered happily, "Don't you worry about that. I am the only Prince, the only heir of the Family." Ye Chong's question got him excited.

Ye Chong was beginning to form a plan of his own. Sun Sieha must have a lot of people working for him, and plenty of support from others. He would be powerless in a battle against the Prince's army being alone like he was now. Instead of making enemies, cooperating with the Prince might work better for him. He would be able to complete his research with help from the Prince. His research required a lot of manpower and resources, and both of them cost too much. If he had only himself to rely on, he might never even complete his research work. The thought forced Ye Chong to consider working with the Prince.

Their situation now allowed him to negotiate effectively, given that he had enough strength to speak as an equal to the Prince.

"I'm not interested in your proposal just now," Ye Chong's words brought a look of disappointment to Sun Sieha's face.

Ye Chong ignored the man and continued calmly, "However, I believe that we can reach an agreement with different terms."

Sun Sieha burst into a smile, and asked with interest, "Oh, what terms do you have in mind?"

Ye Chong went off tangent, "That's not important right now. First, let us have a look at the power of these cannon arrays."

As Ye Chong finished, the cannon arrays turned, redirecting their aim from the people to the sky.

"Target locked, wide range sweeping mode engaged," the electronic voice announced. Sun Sieha thought to himself, "As expected, the man has a partner." However, he thought Ye Chong's actions were strange. A demonstration to scare them was hardly necessary.

Everyone saw a burst of light as the cannons fired.

Numerous light grenades were launched into the air. A bright spark was produced whenever a grenade was shot out of the cannon barrels. The combined brightness from 49 cannon barrels was glaring. The bright lights blinded everyone for a few seconds.

They all looked horrified.

The weapons were terribly scary!

No one saw exactly how the cannons worked, but their parapsychic sense allowed them to feel every minute detail of the cannon arrays. The power condensed in each photon grenade was shocking. The cannons in quick successions, all 49 cannon barrels covering the sky with a photon shower. They were all stunned by how destructive these weapons were.

Rumble rumble!

The earth shook as explosions were heard coming from afar. Everyone went pale from shock. They had all underestimated the power of these cannons despite preparing themselves for the worst.

Sun Sieha's eyes were shining with rapture. He stared at the cannon arrays hungrily.

"What do you think?" Ye Chong asked Sun Sieha calmly.

"They're absolutely powerful! Weapons fit for the God of War!" Sun Sieha muttered to himself. He was in a state of half madness.

"I can sell them to you." Ye Chong's calmly delivered sentence was almost as shocking as the demonstration with the cannon arrays.

Sun Sieha cried out excitedly, "Wonderful! I'll have all of them! Name your price!" These cannon arrays were not particularly useful for him personally, but they were truly weapons of destruction, and the Prince could appreciate their value.

Ye Chong shook his head, "I have other conditions."

"Tell me," Sun Sieha said, now calmer.

Ye Chong said, "I will sell two of these cannon arrays to you every month. You will pay 20 million ao for each of them. All our deals in future will be in the form of a trade."

"No problem," Sun Sieha replied without thinking.

"Besides that, I need a Level 8 shooter as my personal bodyguard. I will pick one from your group. I have the right to from my own security detail."

"No problem," Sun Sieha added, "You can choose any Level 8 shooter from my subordinates. Your security detail cannot consist of more than five thousand men. On the other hand, you can only sell your weapons to me, and not to other organizations." In fact, Sun Sieha would be more than willing to assign all his Level 8 shooters to protect him. The man was valuable, an asset that any country would not hesitate to protect. Sun Sieha believed that Ye Chong was even more valuable than he previously thought. The man's outstanding close range combat skills were outshined by his other skillset.

"I agree. However, personal weapons are exempted from this rule. In addition, no one can restrict my movements. Under no circumstances will I be interrupted from my research," Ye Chong said.

"No problem. You can even stay in the Royal Palace if you want to. Do anything you like. No one will interfere with your life. However, you must return to the capital with me." Sun Sieha understood well that talented people like Ye Chong valued their freedom more than anything, hence he quickly agreed to the term. Nevertheless, anything would have its drawbacks, just like freedom. This talented man would definitely benefit him, but he was to fall into the hands of another organization, the consequences would not be in his favor.

"Agreed," Ye Chong nodded. The deal was made. He felt satisfied by this outcome. Once he was done tackling some difficult problems, no one would be able to stop him from leaving.

"Today is a day worth remembering. I believe this agreement between you and I is worthy of a place in our historical records." Sun Sieha was also satisfied with their agreement. He felt very excited about it. The terms of their agreement were all empty promises in the end. Once the man was in the capital, how could he hope to escape from the Prince's grasp?

Kristen was in a daze. The deadly battle had suddenly turned into a peaceful negotiation. Her teacher had become a Royal weaponsmith.

Perhaps she was in a dream. She never knew that Ye Chong, who never showed much about himself, could handle the situation so well. He had conducted himself with confidence and composure.

Ye Chong had little choice in the matter. It was hard to come to a peaceful resolution. This was the best way he could think of. His experience had taught him how to deal with matters with more flexibility and even creativity.

The five cannon arrays were all sold to Sun Sieha. Ye Chong's finances were secure. 100 million ao was enough to sustain for a quite a while.

Ye Chong chose Sha Ya as his bodyguard. The truth was, he was more used to relying only on himself. However, he had asked for a Level 8 shooter for other reasons. Sha Ya was the best candidate, since he got to know her before Sun Sieha.

Strong people would always gain respect from the people around them. From the looks in the eyes of these people in the courtyard, it was easy to see that they all respected the young weaponsmith for his skills. The magnificent demonstration with the canon arrays had left a deep impression in them.

To them, Ye Chong was a mysterious character. He was young, but more knowledgeable than anyone else in weapon making. Moreover, he was an excellent combatant. His muscles could perform extraordinary feats, making him a threat for anyone around him. Besides, he seemed to have a partner hiding somewhere. They all heard the mechanical voice clearly. This further intensified the air of mystery around the young man.

Kristen's status was now elevated. As the great master Ye Chong's only student, her position was significant. It looked like the two million ao she had paid to be Ye Chong's student turned out to be her best investment ever.

Sun Sieha received a letter, which came from a Level 7 shooter. The shooter had come straight from the capital just to deliver the letter to Sun Sieha.

Sun Sieha opened the letter, and was surprised by what he read.

"Return to the capital immediately." The order to Sun Sieha was simple and direct.

Ye Chong did not need to pack. He deposited the defence system's photon processor into Celest's ring. Until he could build one himself, every photon processor was very precious to him.

Ye Chong and Sha Ya flew in the same fighter. The group headed for the capital in their fighter aircrafts.

The fighters were all high grade aircrafts, and could fly at very high velocities. Even the pilot with the lowest qualifications was a Level 7 shooter.

They arrived at the capital when the sky turned dark. The night sky seemed to devour the capital like a giant beast.

This was the capital of Eastern Cloud – Su City. It was a city that had existed for more than 3 thousand years, and in the last 2 thousand had served as the country's capital. This was also the largest and most modern city Eastern Cloud country.

Aircrafts flew by here and there in the sky, decorating the night sky with colorful lights.

Expecting Sun Sieha's return, his guards had all prepared themselves to receive him. Sun Sieha had a good reputation amongst the country's soldiers. He was the most outstanding Prince in the history of the Sieha Royal Family, and also an excellent war general. As he had proven himself capable, Sun Sieha often headed outside the Palace since he was young to assist the common people with their difficulties.

Sun Sieha's butler, Ba Luomeng, was also there to receive him.

"This is an important guest of mine. See that all of his requests are met during his stay," Sun Sieha said to his butler.

Ba Luomeng bowed in reply, "Yes, my liege!"

"This is my butler, Ba Luomeng. I have some urgent matters to attend to in the next few days. Just let him know if you need anything," Sun Sieha informed Ye Chong hastily before making his way to the Palace.

Of course Ye Chong was not interested in what Sun Sieha was up to. In fact, he wished the Prince would just busy himself with work and forget about him. However, that was only wishful thinking.

"Dear Sir, it is now late in the hour. Would you prefer to dine first, or have some rest? Or maybe a shower? Please let me know if you require anything, and I will do my best to see to them. If they are beyond my capabilities, I will relay your request to the Prince," Ba Luomeng inquired with care. He was 50 this year, with wrinkles at the corner of his eyes and a slightly overweight figure. He had served the Sieha family since he was about 10 years old. Having served the family for more than 40 years, he knew from the way the Prince spoke that this was a very important and significant guest.

The guest was a very young man, with a beautiful woman beside

him who was looking around her curiously. Could this be the Prince of another country?

Ba Luomeng had his suspicions, but he was not foolish enough to ask for more information. As a servant of the Royal Family, he should only do what was required of his duty, and nothing more. He had seen many people who had vanished because of their curiosity. All these years, he was trusted by the Prince because he knew what questions not to ask.

Chapter 531: Fish and Net I

The millennia old Su City was now in a period of instability. Rumours of the King's passing were hotly discussed amongst the common people. No one knew who started the rumours, but it was now circulating around the city. Sun Sieha's return to the capital yesterday seemed to bring some truth to the rumours. Everything that was happening seemed to be related to this unconfirmed news.

Prince Sun had rushed to the Royal Palace soon after he reached the capital yesterday, and had not left since. The people of Eastern Cloud loved their King, Ze Sieha, father to Prince Sun. Ze's reign was transparent and efficient. Under his rule, the country had prospered and grown stronger, threatening to topple Southern Land's position as the strongest country in the world.

By midday, the Royal Palace finally made an official announcement of the King's passing. The people mourned. Citizens of Su City put whitebell flowers on their person as a sign of grieving. Everywhere on the streets, the people looked mournful, wearing a tiny whitebell flower on their chest.

It was a busy and chaotic day. The new King would ascend the throne on the same day as the former King's passing, as was Eastern Cloud's tradition. There was no dispute on who should inherit the throne, as Sun Sieha was the only Prince and heir. He would lead his people and continue forward.

The people were sad, but they were also hopeful for the future of their country. No one doubted the capabilities of Prince Sun, or rather, His Majesty the King. He was widely respected by those in the army and the government, and also the common people.

Nonetheless, not everyone shared this optimism, especially the older government councillors. The old King was kind and merciful, but the new king was entirely different. He had served in the

military when he was young, and even today, still had control over a majority of the country's armies. He was stern and decisive, with very little hesitation for violence and killing. Besides, his ruthlessness was a cause of wariness for the councillors.

After Sun Sieha was crowned King, the instability in Su City gradually dissipated. Su City reverted back to its daily hustle and bustle, unhindered by the sudden change in power, just as the old King had wished for.

On this seemingly ordinary day, a new era of ruling had begun.

Ye Chong wandered the streets of Su City, with Ba Luomeng as his guide. Trailing behind him was his only student, Kristen, and the Level 8 shooter who had been assigned to him, Sha Ya.

Ever since witnessing the fierce battle that day, Kristen behaved like a completely different person in front of Ye Chong. She was obedient and never acted arrogantly in front of Ye Chong again. Ye Chong was unused to her mannerism at first, but since Kristen would be less likely to cause trouble this way, he chose to let her be.

Kristen's quietness, Sha Ya's seriousness and Ye Chong's characteristic indifference made them look like the coldest trio ever existed.

How long had it been since Ba Luomeng acted as a tour guide? He could not recall exactly, but it might be 20 years ago, or was it 30? To ensure that his honoured guests were satisfied, he had even brought along a younger servant, Man, with him. He had not felt like leading the tour himself at first, since he was already quite old, but in the end he could not get over worrying about the guests, and went along with them.

Perhaps because the strict, old butler was with them, Man started off being a little awkward. However, he slowly opened up and spoke with more enthusiasm and humour. Kristen giggled at his antics, narrowing her eyes into a smile. Even the ever serious

looking Sha Ya could not help but smiled. Man was just over 20 years old. He had a strong body and a witty character. Growing up in the streets of Su City, he was familiar with its every twist and turn, making him the best tour guide one could hope for.

Ye Chong found something strange about the place. There were rarely any aircrafts in Su City. Upon inquiring, he found out that the area above Su City was restricted airspace. All aircrafts must land or take off at the landing field outside the city. If they entered the city's airspace by mistake, they could well be shot down by the city's aerial defence system.

The first thing to do was to find a place to settle down, only then can Ye Chong plan his future in earnest. He had a rough idea of what to do, but there were many details that he needed to think on. Without Mu/Shang by his side, there was no one else to help him. He must take care of everything himself.

Sun Sieha's former Royal accommodation was not uncomfortable, but Ye Chong thought it safer to find a place of his own.

Ba Luomeng may not be an outstanding tour guide, but his status in the community of nobles and aristocrats was unquestionable. Soon, he was able to gather a list of people who were interested in selling their house or land.

Ba Luomeng did not cross the line of his duties. He only asked Ye Chong for details the property such as house and land size, but not the purpose of his venture.

"I have what you asked for," Ba Luomeng bowed respectfully and reported, "You had asked for a wide piece of land, and a quiet and peaceful environment. There are many manors like these around Su City. There are currently 13 who were interested in selling. Here are the top three. If you think they're not suitable, please wait for a few days as we will have more information by then.

"The first manor is located south of Su City, right beside a river

with an excellent view. It belongs to the Count of Sware. Price estimate puts it at around 50 million. It's about a hundred kilometres from Su City. The second manor is located at the border of Su City. The house was built by a sculptor, then sold at a high price to Sir Bikki. It has a rather unique architecture, with a valuation price of about 80 million."

Ba Luomeng took a quick glance at Ye Chong, saw him listening intently, then cleared his throat and continued, "The third one is located to the north of Su City. It is the furthest away, at about 300 kilometers from the capital. The land area for this manor is also the largest. It is surrounded by mountains on three sides, and is the most affordable of the three. You can purchase it for about 15 ao. Besides, you will also gain ownership of the land around the manor, which is about 25 square kilometres in area."

Good views, pleasant architecture and the like did not interest Ye Chong. In the end, he chose the third one. Being the furthest from Su City, it would also allow him to stay as far away from the complicated place as possible.

From the books he read, he understood that the capital would always be complicated. He was not weak and helpless now, but he still needed time to figure out ways to fight against his enemies.

From the games that he had played with Mu/Shang, Ye Chong learned that if he stood out before making sure he had the strength to back his play, failure would be a very likely outcome. Instead of doing that, he should focus on lying low and finding more effective ways to best his enemies.

Once, Ye Chong had fought in a very straightforward and simple manner. With his superior combat skills and Mu/Shang as his backup, he had managed to survive more than a few close calls.

As Ye Chong grew more experienced, he became more appreciative of strategizing. The one event that truly convinced him of this was when he had to lead his fleet to survival. Whether

it was in real life situations or in the game that Ye Chong played with Mu/Shang, he had to force himself to change his methods. One would always grow fastest when through actual experience.

There must always be room for change. Ye Chong did not have a rigid mindset. He had realized that there could be easier ways to tackle the same problem. This realization helped him a lot. Whenever he was facing a problem, he would always ask himself if there was a better solution to it.

Nevertheless, despite his continuous personal growth, Ye Chong's innate personality made him inclined towards more aggressive methods.

...

When Sun Sieha finished with Ba Luomeng's report, he broke into a smile. He immediately gave the order for Ba Luomeng to assist with Ye Chong's purchase.

"Now this is definitely not on me, it's all your doing," Sun Sieha thought to himself. He had been vexed by the problem of controlling Ye Chong, but now he just felt like laughing out loud. Behind him, a map laid open, showing the location of Ye Chong's manor of choice. Close beside it was a marking that represented a military camp.

...

Ba Luomeng received his orders from Sun Sieha and worked even more cautiously. He had only been giving a routine report to the King. He could understand how busy His Majesty must be right now, newly ascended to the throne, with many important matters to see to. Hence, when Ba Luomeng received a direct order from Sun Sieha, he was very much surprised.

"See to it immediately." The order was simple, but as a long time servant of Sun Sieha, Ba Luomang could tell that His Majesty placed great importance in this matter.

Once again, he was struck by curiosity of the honoured guest. Who was he, to warrant so much attention from the King?

Ba Luomeng worked efficiently. He completed all the necessary paperwork for Ye Chong's purchase on that day itself.

As the actual buyer of the manor, Ye Chong could appreciate deeply how very much more expensive the manor was compared to houses in Yedda City. Fortunately, the deal included the 25 square kilometres of land around the manor.

The owner's gratefulness having completed the transaction seemed a little odd to Ye Chong.

All of this was too unfamiliar to him. He could barely understand how a transaction worked. Besides, Ba Luomeng's demonstrated expertise convinced Ye Chong that he should just let the butler deal with the matter.

Now that he owned a house of his own, Ye Chong did not want to stay in Sun Sieha's place any longer. He, Kristen, Sha Ya and the manor's former owner bid farewell to Ba Luomeng and flew off to the property of interest.

Since he could not use Celest, Ye Chong had to fly with Sha Ya in her fighter once again. Kristen had her own fighter, but it was far inferior compared to Sha Ya's fighter.

This was also Ye Chong's first time seeing the landing field. The field was almost as large as an entire city. It was split into many different sections, which were used for landing or take-off. All round the landing field were rows of storehouses used to store the aircrafts. When shooters landed on the field, they would hand over their aircrafts to the landing field staff to store them, and retrieve the aircrafts themselves later.

Some rich families would even build their own miniature landing field in their own backyards.

Soon, Ye Chong found the manor he had purchased. Once he was

here, he realized how large it actually was. The manor itself was about 15 square kilometres wide, built along the slope of a mountain, giving it an air of magnificence. Together with the land around it, the total land area was close to 40 square kilometres. As long as he was not building a large warship, the space was enough for him to do as he pleased.

There was a small landing field in the manor, which could accommodate up to 100 aircrafts. When they arrived at the place, the servants had already gathered by the landing field to welcome them.

Both buyer and seller finalized the transaction swiftly.

"Do you need them?" The former owner of the manor was a businessman. He pointed at the servants and asked Ye Chong respectfully. He would not dare to be rude towards this young man, since the official witness of their transaction was the former butler of His Majesty the King.

"No," Ye Chong shook his head.

The businessman nodded, "I understand." He had expected this. A man of his stature would not deign to hire his servants. The higher a person was up the social ladder, the higher the requirement for their servants.

The matter of servants had never crossed Ye Chong's mind. He did not plan to hire any housekeepers here. Soon, all the servants were sent away by the former manor owner. As the businessman took his leave, the manor now lay huge and empty, like a lifeless palace.

Kristen and Sha Ya exchanged looks of bafflement. They did not understand what Ye Chong was thinking.

Du Feng was inspecting his soldiers in training. He walked past each of them with precise, measured steps. His eyes were sharp.

None of the soldiers dared to look into them. His parapsychic sense covered the entire training ground, so that he would know if anyone was lazing around.

He was the highest ranking officer in this military camp, but he did not like to watch his soldiers from high above, in his office. Instead, he preferred to walk under the sun and monitor his soldiers up close.

Du Feng had a stern face that commanded respect. All the soldiers here respected and feared him, except for one – his second in command, Li Gui.

Li Gui was an easygoing man. He could chat up almost anyone, and was close to the soldiers in the camp. Li Gui had a close relationship with Du Feng. They had met each other during their freshman bootcamp. Later, they had fought side by side through numerous battles. Their friendship had strengthened because of their shared history.

"Old Du, Old Du, come here!" Li Gui waved at Du Feng from a shaded corner of the camp.

Du Feng took a sweeping glance at his new soldiers, and gave some orders to the training officer before heading towards Li Gui. Since he suffered a particularly heavy injury some time ago, Li Gui's health never fully recovered. Hence, he had moved to a more secretarial position, working for Du Feng.

Du Feng never acted like he was Li Gui's superior.

He walked to the shaded corner and felt refreshed. He sat down heavily beside Li Gui and said, "I say, Gui, it's a very hot day today, why'd you come out all the here? Careful that you don't go down on of a heatstroke, or your siblings will come bother me again."

"Come on, don't you tease me just because my body ain't what it used to be two years ago. Don't forget who could wipe the floor with your *ss once upon a time," Li Gui looked at Du Feng with

mock disdain.

Du Feng laughed dryly, "Look at you, so sensitive, I was only joking." Indeed, Li Gui was once much stronger than Du Feng, but his physical condition had declined sharply ever since his injury.

Li Gui nodded towards the training ground and asked, "How's the new batch?"

When it came to military matters, Du Feng turned serious. He replied with a look of concern, "They're barely passable. I've found a huge problem with them."

"What is it?" Li Gui asked.

"All the new soldiers in this batch have reached Level 4 in parapsychic control, but their physical condition is deplorable. Some of them would even faint because of standing under the sun for too long," Du Feng said with a stern face.

"Well, that is a problem," Li Gui nodded in agreement. This was a common issue with shooters in general. Shooters often focused on training their parapsychic sense, but not on their physique. This was especially obvious when screening for new soldiers. There were no requirements on the physical fitness of new recruits, as long as their parapsychic control was at least level 4. The problem of physical fitness was a long enduring one. Li Gui was one of its casualties. He was never particularly strong physically, so his injury had caused his abilities to decline sharply.

"What do you plan to do?" Li Gui asked.

Du Feng looked helpless. "What can I do? These freshies will have to be toughened up. I have to say, though, these freshies like to complain about physical training, hehe."

"Poor fellows," Li Gui watched sympathetically at the new recruits carrying out their training.

"It has to be done. Better to suffer a bit now than to lose their lives later," Du Feng commented, all pragmatism.

"Yeah," Li Gui agreed with him. As soldiers who had been through actual war, they both knew it for a fact. Suddenly, Li Gui remembered something and muttered, annoyed, "All this chatting, and I've nearly forgotten about something important."

"What is it?" Du Feng asked, curious.

Li Gui said, "You probably haven't heard of it, but the nearby manor's changed hands."

"Changed hands? Who's the new owner now?" Du Feng asked with interest, "Heh, that guy's probably had enough of us and finally sold off his manor. I wonder which unlucky b*stard bought the place. Not that I'm ridiculing them, but that place, it's quite suitable to build a military camp there, don't you think? Why build a manor? However, it's been quite a convenience for us too. Thanks to your idea of using that place for drilling exercises, we've saved quite a lot of expenses. Now that there's a new owner in the house, I wonder who they are, where they come from, have you figure them out?"

Li Gui shook his head and replied, "No, but I heard that there are only three of them."

"Three? That can't be right," Du Feng said in disbelief, "That place is worth at least 10 million ao, who would spend that much money just to come here and suffer? I know rich people, they all like to enjoy themselves. What's there to do here for those three? Spending 10 million for a place in the middle of nowhere is just ridiculous."

"I haven't got the details yet, it sure feels like a strange deal. I think we should stay off their backs first, who knows if they're related to someone high up? That businessman last time didn't have any backing, that's why he never so much as squeaked. These three, though, we should look into them first," Li Gui suggested.

"No way!" Du Feng panicked, "The drilling sessions are all planned out. We're not expanding the camp just yet, where else

can we go for practise drills?" Li Gui and Du Feng had always arranged for drilling exercises to be held at the manor since there were more buildings there, and because the surroundings were more realistic. They had conducted a few nighttime infiltration exercises and counter infiltration exercises at that place with good results. Hence, Du Feng was adamant to make it their official training ground.

The former owner of the manor was only a normal businessman, who could not do anything against the arrogant and intimidating soldiers. Besides, the only problem the businessman would have was a lack of good sleep. There were never missing items, and no one was ever hurt in the manor. Hence, the former owner had refrained from complaining.

"Why don't we get Lil' San to have a look? Guy knows people like no one's business, especially the nobles and aristocrats. If they're really from upper society, he would recognize them," Li Gui suggested after some thought. This Lil' San that Li Gui mentioned was born a noble. He was sent to the military by his family because of his frequent wild adventures outdoors.

"Alright! Let's do that!" Du Feng agreed immediately. He marched quickly towards the training ground and yelled out loud, "Ren San, fall out!"

A small and cunning looking man left his formation and followed Du Feng to meet Li Gui. Li Gui whispered by his ear as Ren San nodded occasionally, his eyes looking around eagerly.

After a moment, he left the military camp under the jealous looks of his fellow military comrades.

Chapter 532: Fish and Net II

In the large and empty manor, Kristen and Sha Ya found themselves at a loss. They exchanged a sympathetic look before following Ye Chong from behind. Ye Chong ignored them both. He took his time going through every corner of the manor. When the tour was over, he already knew what to do. Building a stronghold was not a difficult task for him.

Even so, the operation would be quite extensive, and had to be done step by step. This place was much larger than his little courtyard. He could plan larger scale defences, but it would require much more work.

Sha Ya suddenly looked up, alert. "Someone's here." She was looking at the top a hill.

Ye Chong followed her gaze and saw three figures on the hill. They were very far away, making them hard to make them out. The figures seemed to be watching them. "A Level 8 shooter is so sensitive," Ye Chong thought to himself, impressed.

"Do you know them?" Du Feng asked Ren San. He would not want to lose an excellent practice site for nothing. In fact, a military establishment like theirs did not lack funding to build their own training ground. However, Du Feng noticed that his soldiers, be it freshies or veterans, were always more alert and enthusiastic when they entered the manor. All the simulation grounds that they had built never quite had this effect. Du Feng was generously funded, but buying the manor would never be approved by his superiors. In any case, even he thought it was not really justified.

Ren San picked up his binoculars and watched for a long moment. Finally, he shook his head decisively and said, "Never seen them before. They're all unfamiliar faces."

"Could they be nobles from somewhere else?" Li Gui asked

warily.

Ren San rejected his suggestion confidently, "Don't seem like it. Their clothes are too casual. No noble will dress like that. Besides, look at the way they walk, there's no grace. If any noble dared to walk like that, they'd surely be dragged back to etiquette class."

"So you're saying they're not any kind of noble or councillor?" Du Feng was feeling better already.

"Definitely not!" Ren San declared.

Du Feng and Li Gui exchanged smiles.

They did not see the moment when Sha Ya looked up and right at them. If they saw this, they would never have acted so carelessly. If the woman could sense them from so far away, she was surely ...

...

"You're in charge of security," Ye Chong said to Sha Ya. Perhaps only someone like Ye Chong would ask a Level 8 shooter to protect his living quarters. However, Ye Chong thought it was his best option. A shooter was much more effective than holographic scanning in relatively short distances.

"Yes sir," Sha Ya acknowledged solemnly. Now that Ye Chong was her master, she must carry out all his orders with absolute dedication. Besides, Sha Ya's experience told her that those three figures must be planning something for them.

Ye Chong and Kristen began to clean up the manor, while Sha Ya took up her gun and patrolled the land.

The previous owner did not stay here long. This was obvious from the simple and shabby furniture. This made Ye Chong's life easier, however, since he did not have to spend much time cleaning up the place.

Kristen looked at Ye Chong, flabbergasted. She had never seen

anyone lift something that was hundreds of kilograms with one hand, carry it outside the house and easily flinging it more than 50 meters away.

Was this guy even human? Kristen looked a little discomfited.

Ye Chong worked like a machine, fast and efficient. Soon, he had emptied the building closest to him. Almost all the furniture were thrown out, leaving an empty house.

Kristen could not understand what Ye Chong was up to. Those were still serviceable furniture. Kristen's heart ached whenever Ye Chong threw one out, smashing it into pieces.

This was a retro style building. Green creepers covered the outer walls of the house, giving the structure a touch of classical elegance. There were about 20 to 30 buildings like this on the manor's land. This particular building was situated closest to the centre. Since the servants rarely came here, the place was covered with dust in every corner.

The building was a little fancy to his liking, and not sturdy enough, but Ye Chong was satisfied with its location. The building had its back facing the precipitous cliffs. He decided to make this his control centre.

However, all of the work will have to wait till tomorrow. Right now, he had no materials to build his weapons. All the equipment and items in Celest's ring were too sensitive to bring out, since they were lightyears ahead of local technology. Without proper defences in place, he would not take them out.

Night came. The manor was far from the city, away from the electric lights and urban noise. Here, insects sang in the gentle breeze, bringing peace to the land.

Up on the hilltop, Du Feng said to Li Gui happily, "Hehe, looks like we got lucky. The newcomer's not some untouchable person. We'll just proceed as usual. Hehe, let's welcome them with real

action."

Li Gui looked concerned, but seemed hesitant to speak up.

Du Feng noticed his expression. He patted Li Gui's shoulder and said nonchalantly, "Don't worry, even if they're really some noble or other, nothing's gonna happen. Do you think His Highness, no, His Majesty now, will really kill us all? We'll just be forced to apologize or something, as long as we don't go overboard. We can also take this opportunity to see if the new owner's a toughy or some loser."

Li Gui thought it over and felt comforted. He looked at Du Feng in surprise, "I never noticed that you've got so much brains in your head. That's some planning ahead there."

"Heh, I got that from you," Du Feng looked pleased, but he tried to brush it off. Li Gui wanted to laugh at his antics. However, Du Feng's next sentence quickly dissolved his good mood into bitter annoyance.

"However, if apology's really in order, you're the one who has to go. You're shameless, and you're smooth with words, who else better to represent us all?"

Soon, it was time to begin the drill session. Du Feng gathered himself and turned serious. He was always serious in carrying out their drill sessions. This was why he earned the trust of Sun Sieha.

"Begin!" Du Feng's command sounded like a threat to the enemy, marking the beginning of their training. He would be at the hilltop, observing the entire exercise.

In the darkness, Sha Ya came out of her meditative state. She opened her eyes that gleamed with killing intent. Like a slippery fox, she stood up silently and picked up the laser gun by her knees.

She pushed open the door slowly, but was interrupted by a male voice from a dark corner, "Someone's ambushing us." Sha Ya nearly jumped up in surprise. She turned to look to the source of

the voice.

It was Ye Chong. She exhaled deeply, reverting back to calmness.

Both of them exchanged a look without a word, only nodding once to each other. Immediately after that, Sha Ya was surprised to find that the man had simply vanished out of sight.

She composed herself, calming her mind. Then, she reached out with her parapsychic waves.

...

This was Lin Dai's fifth nighttime drill session. By now, he knew his way around the manor, perhaps even better than the previous owner. He enjoyed training here. The thought of running around some noble's house was exciting. He knew that his comrades shared the sentiment. Every time after their training, they would come together and talk about how the owner had to silently endure their trespassing. If they were lucky, they could even catch the sight of a female servant taking a bath.

Who would not like this wonderful place?

There were many large trees planted on the manor's land. At night, the place was dark. The terrain was complicated due to the many buildings built on the land. They must stay alert at all times to avoid biting the dust. He was very experienced in this respect.

Lin Dai hid himself in the trees, his camouflage helping him blend into the surroundings. He had already spread out his parapsychic sense around him. If anyone entered his range, he would attack.

He was patient. In fact, all veterans were patient hunters, waiting for their prey.

Someone was coming!

An "enemy" entered his parapsychic sensing range. He drew his laser gun and fired without hesitation, hitting his target.

According to the rules, the soldier who was hit must leave the battleground immediately. The light beam from the gun was not harmful, but it would leave a mark where they were hit.

Lin Dai whistled quietly. Score! This meant that even if he were to be hit tonight, he would not lose any marks for tonight's drilling session.

Bending over his waist, he began to move between the trees. He knew that the attack had exposed his location. He must quickly move to a new location.

Suddenly, a hand appeared from behind him and covered his mouth.

He wanted to scream. This was against the rules! He tried to remove the hand with his own, but the attacker's hand did not budge. Before he could say anything, he felt a pain in his neck, and his vision went dark. He lost consciousness. The last thought in his mind was – who was this motherf*cker?

Ye Chong put the man down carefully. He did not look at the man again. That twist had broken the soldier's neck, definitely.

Ye Chong did not care to ask for their purpose of being here. The way he saw it, there were not many reasons that could lead a group of fully armed shooters into his manor. He looked around for his next target.

Sha Ya shared his perspective. However, unlike Ye Chong, she noticed that these men were actually soldiers! What were the soldiers doing here? Regardless, there was no reason for them to be here. This was private property. She had the right to defend this place. Others might be intimidated by the military, but not Sha Ya – she was a Level 8 shooter, at the top of the shooter hierarchy. These Level 4 minions were not even worth the effort.

The military had many strong shooters of their own, but Level 8 shooters were still very rare. Most of the soldiers were Level 5 or 6.

To qualify for Level 8 required not only hard work and talent, but also a bit of luck. The organized and stable lifestyle of a soldier did not encourage them to grow into Level 8 shooters. Most of the shooters who achieved Level 8 were independent and experienced.

No one would dare to disrespect a Level 8 shooter, not even Sun Sieha.

Sha Ya lifted the laser gun in her hand. Every Level 8 shooter had survived countless battles. Weaker minds would never achieve Level 8. To become a Level 8 shooter was not just a matter of skills.

A Level 8 shooter was so much stronger than a Level 4. Sha Ya handled the soldiers with ease. Every shot brought down another soldier. She did not have to hide herself, for her parapsychic sensing range was dozens of times larger than the soldiers. She moved fast, and fired smoothly, unlike these young soldiers.

Sha Ya was like a bright spark in the dark. Her expression was cold and merciless. Her every shot was fired without hesitation. She fired shot after shot without stopping, never missing her targets.

The soldiers cried in pain, breaking the silence in the manor.

Up on the hilltop, Du Feng and Li Gui noticed that something was wrong. They realized that they had made a huge mistake, or more precisely, they had overlooked a simple matter. There was another kind of people, aside from nobles, that they should never mess with – strong shooters.

Du Feng spoke through gritted teeth, "All of you, with me." He led his soldiers running down the hill towards the manor. He could not just stand and watch his soldiers killed one by one.

The soldiers heard him, and quickly followed Du Feng, rushing down the mountain.

Li Gui looked pale. He turned around and said to his guard, "You, go back to camp and ask all the capable soldiers to come here, get

all the Level 6's and above. Come with their fighters! Quick!"

The guard was surprised, but made a quick bow and retreated to their camp.

Du Feng was a strong man, so he led the charge down the hill. He was panicking inside. It was a massacre down there. The crazy lady, some high Level shooter, had dared to kill so many soldiers from the Royal Military. His eyes burned with rage.

When Du Feng arrived, Sha Ya had already cleared her immediate surroundings.

She kept her gun up and walked towards Du Feng. There was not a single person alive around her.

Du Feng felt pained. These were all soldiers that he raised and trained! Despite his emotions, Du Feng conducted himself professionally as a military leader should.

"Who are you?" Du Feng asked, barely containing his anger.

Sha Ya stared coldly at Du Feng and said, "I should be the one asking you that."

Du Feng's expression darkened dangerously, "I serve the Royal Military as Brigade Commander of the 1st Legion, 5th Brigade."

"Why do you allow your soldiers to enter my manor?" Sha Ya asked sternly. She was quietly surprised to find that they were from the 1st Legion. The 1st Legion was infamous in the entire country of Eastern Cloud. They served their duties with great commitment, and had been in the favour of every King that had ever ruled the country. Nevertheless, Sha Ya was not afraid of them. She was a Level 8 shooter, and had a master who was powerful enough to back her up.

"How dare you kill soldiers of the Royal Military?" Du Feng's eyes were red with anger. He glared fiercely at Sha Ya.

Sha Ya was unmoved by his feelings. "By the laws of Eastern

Cloud, if anyone were to trespass a property while armed, the property owner has the right to defend themselves. I believed you know that, Brigade Commander."

The soldiers around Du Feng were outraged by her statement. They were proud men, not used to having their egos offended. The soldiers cried out in protest and readied their weapons.

"You dare?" Sha Ya lifted an eyebrow.

One of the soldiers ignored what common sense should tell him and raised his gun. Before Du Feng could stop him, a laser beam shot right into the centre of the soldier's forehead. The soldier opened his eyes wide in disbelief, and fell headfirst to the ground.

"Anyone moves, that happens," Sha Ya looked at the soldiers coldly. The killing intent in her eyes showed that the Level 8 shooter was very much p*ssed off.

Ye Chong was running in the dark. He had killed no less than a dozen men. Even so, he was less efficient than Sha Ya. The shooter's skills allowed her to decimate the enemies with terrifying efficacy.

In just a short while, all the soldiers who invaded the manor were killed. Now, Ye Chong saw both sides of the battle facing off each another.

The soldiers stared at Sha Ya, but none of them moved. Ye Chong did not expect that his decision to have a Level 8 shooter bodyguard would come in handy so quickly.

Hidden in the shades of the trees, Ye Chong considered the situation and made his decision. The trees provided him with good cover. He made his way quietly to the back of the soldiers.

"Fine! We'll remember this."

Du Feng was so furious inside. He wanted to just charge ahead and crush his enemy. However, he also knew that the difference in strength between them was too great. The shooter was good,

unlike anyone he had ever encountered. They might have the advantage in numbers, but not enough to cover the disparity between them.

He would not let this matter rest like this, though. The military was not short of skilled shooters.

Du Feng grieved deeply for the soldiers he had lost, for he had watched them train and grow into fine young men. He regretted not bringing more capable soldiers with him, or their opponent would not have dared to challenge him so openly.

He decided to take revenge for those soldiers, even if it would cost him his job!

Just then, a swarm of black dots appeared in the sky, far away. A low humming sound came from that direction.

Sha Ya looked slightly perturbed, but Du Feng looked to kill.

Fighters! Those were fighters!

Chapter 533: Fish and Net III

Du Feng was overjoyed – the fighters were right on time! Even a Level 8 shooter could not stand against an attack from so many fighter aircrafts. This was why even Level 8 shooters would cave in to the power of an entire country. A high Level shooter was stronger when armed with a high spec fighter.

Aerial advantage, higher velocities and stronger firepower – these were all the advantages that an aircraft would gain over an armed shooter. A whole squad of fighters was an even staggering enemy. This formation, usually reserved for an actual war, was now deployed for battle.

Sha Ya stayed calm. She had spread her parapsychic sensing range to the maximum.

High in the sky, the fighters came closer and closer. The low humming sound was now loud enough to shake the ground.

Sha Ya focused her gaze and pointed her gun up. She fired once, the laser beam shooting through the clouds.

Bang! A fighter exploded into a fireball the air. The red fiery mass expanded like a blossoming flower.

The explosion was completely unexpected. No one thought that the shooter would fire first when the odds were very much against her favour. The aircraft formation was momentarily disturbed.

Du Feng signalled to his men to prepare to retreat. If they gain distance away from the terrifying woman, the fighters would be able to shoot freely without worrying about friendly fire. Sha Ya was busy dealing with the aircrafts to notice them.

Du Feng and his soldiers had worked together for a long time. They understood him immediately.

Just when they were prepared to leave, a silhouette suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

When Ye Chong saw the fighters, he knew that their situation was about to get worse. If they come within the fighters' range of fire, they would never be able to escape, no matter how strong they were. The enemy would be merciless against them. They will have to face a full blown aerial attack. Even Ye Chong could not survive that.

Hence, Ye Chong made his move.

Ye Chong hid in the shadows like an assassin. It was now time to make the killing move.

He dashed out like a leopard, powerful and agile.

His target was Du Feng. From the conversation between the man and Sha Ya, he knew that the man was the leader of the other side. These were professional military men. He noticed that, perhaps even before Sha Ya. As someone who had led an army before, he could recognize the military characteristics of these people.

This made Ye Chong act more carefully. Military men were skilled in combat, especially in coordinated movements. Soldiers in a group played distinct roles when in combat. This meant that the more people involved, the harder it was for them to coordinate. Group coordination was also what differentiated military personnel from the common people. When fighting one-on-one, the difference in strength was not obvious; pitch them against each other in groups, and the military men will win for sure.

Ye Chong moved quickly, but the veterans could still notice something was amiss. These soldiers had survived actual wars, and that made them more sensitive to their surroundings.

They all turned nervous.

This was the crucial moment, a moment of life and death. Ye Chong did not hold back.

He moved, quick as lightning, strong as thunder!

With his upper body bent forward, Ye Chong charged towards

the soldiers in front of him, intending to bulldoze right through them. His body posture unchanged as his shoulder ran into one of the soldiers. His shoulder muscles vibrated quickly, and the soldier was flung away, crying out as he did towards the side.

Ye Chong inclined his body slightly and sped up, moving through the soldiers like a sharp knife.

The soldiers cried out in rage and fear. The situation plunged into chaos.

All the soldiers that Ye Chong passed by would fall. No one was a match against his one-strike attack. He was now like a human-shaped fighter. He could control every single part of his body to act as a weapon.

An attack without reserve from Ye Chong was terrifying! Blue lines danced in his vision as he moved quickly amongst his enemies, and Ye Chong would always find the perfect opening to strike out.

A Jie expert was the pinnacle of a combat expert's achievement. This kind of close range attack was perfect for one to fully demonstrate his powers.

In just the blink of an eye, Ye Chong found his way to Du Feng. Behind him was a trail, wide enough for one person. On both sides of the trail were dozens of soldiers, lying silent on the ground. Ye Chong never left anyone alive when he fought like he meant it.

The fighters were already angled downwards, a signal that they were about to start shooting.

Ye Chong moved without delay. He closed in towards Du Feng and wrapped his right hand around the man's neck, gripping tightly onto his throat.

The sudden turn of events took all the soldiers aback. Even Du Feng could not manage a reaction before he felt Ye Chong's hand around his throat, and felt himself lifted up in the air.

With his left hand around Du Feng's waist and his right hand clasping the man's throat, Ye Chong retreated backwards quickly. The muscles on his back wriggled like snakes, repelling anything that came in its way.

The aircrafts were even closer now! Ye Chong felt a strong and dangerous pressure coming down on him, like when he was in Celest, during the battle in Dual Forest.

In the next moment, he found way his to Sha Ya's side.

By then, the closest fighter was less than two kilometres away from them. This was close enough for the fighter to start shooting.

Ye Chong was unafraid. He kept his hand firmly on Du Feng's throat. Du Feng's face was turning blue, but he could not even make a sound. He tried to break free, but the other man was too strong for him.

Standing besides Sha Ya, Ye Chong's expression was cold and emotionless. The killing intent emanating from him now troubled even Sha Ya.

The fighters did not seem to slow down. They were still coming at full speed. The sight of aircrafts coming down from above at high speeds was a tremendous pressure on the enemy, an effective strategy to weaken the other side's morale. Every soldier well versed in military tactics would know this. Even so, few could stand straight without flinching when seeing the fighters approaching. Only a shooter with a strong mind could face this pressure.

Photon grenades rained down heavily. Sha Ya's eyes shined brightly. Ye Chong remained emotionless and unmoved.

Tak tak tak tak tak! The photon grenades hit the ground around Ye Chong and Sha Ya. Sha Ya frowned slightly, turning her face to avoid the rocks that came flying from the ground.

Ye Chong stood still like a statue, allowing the rocks to hit his

face. His right arm was extended straight, his hand around Du Feng's throat.

One by one, the fighters flew past their heads. The photon grenades came like heavily. Ye Chong and Sha Ya were surrounded by potholes in the ground all around them. The flat earth had been repeatedly assaulted and worked to a loose layer of soil.

Ye Chong remained in his posture. When Li Gui arrived, Du Feng was already half conscious. Li Gui immediately ordered for the fighters to stop firing.

Ye Chong finally let his hand go slightly loose. Du Feng inhaled sharply for new air and woke up. Once he was awake, he felt like yelling. However, the other man seemed to know what was about to happen. The hand tightened on his throat again, and Du Feng could no longer make a sound.

Li Gui saw the interaction between them. He knew that they were against a difficult foe this time, a very stubborn one. Both of them were very strong. Li Gui could see immediately that the woman was a Level 8 shooter. The man, however, puzzled him.

If this man had not come out and snatch Du Feng, Li Gui would never know that someone was hiding in the dark. The man was like a shadow, with seemingly inhuman strength. Li Gui remembered the latter clearly.

Li Gui had seem combat experts before, but their moves were only mostly for show. They would overpower normal people, but definitely not shooters.

This man had broken through layers of defence to reach Du Feng. There were no less than a hundred soldiers around him when it happened. From the beginning, no one seemed to be able to stop this man. Li Gui had inspected the soldiers on the ground. They were all dead from a single attack.

Li Gui was surprised by the other party's ruthlessness. It

reminded Li Gui of the killing machines from the military's special division. They were rumoured to be cold blooded killers who were trained to kill with a single attack. They were also cruel and merciless, prioritizing their mission above all others.

Should he ask the man about his identity? Li Gui thought not. Even if the man was from this special division, they were ordered to never expose themselves.

Li Gui went silent for a while before finally speaking up, "Your conditions?"

Li Gui believed that the man must recognize their current positions. A person who could assess the situation and strike where it hurts would not be oblivious to these things.

"Why do you trespass my place?" Ye Chong could not figure it out.

Li Gui answered truthfully, "It was a military drill."

This answer was obviously not enough for Ye Chong and Sha Ya. It was only natural for them to defend their house when it was invaded by armed troops in the middle of the night! Having a drill session on private property was just ridiculous.

However, Ye Chong had no wish to inquire further. He signalled for Sha Ya to take over. Sha Ya was more experienced in dealing with these matters.

Sha Ya considered for a moment, then said, "Have your soldiers leave the manor immediately. No one is allowed to enter this place again without our permission."

"Agreed," Li Gui replied after some thought. In any case, their priority was to save Du Feng first. Making a verbal agreement was not hard for him.

Sha Ya looked into Li Gui's eyes and said, "You must swear this by your honour as a shooter."

Li Gui was taken aback. "What do you mean?"

"This will encourage trust on both sides," Sha Ya explained calmly. She was a seasoned combatant, and would not be so easily soothed.

Li Gui went quiet for a while, then vowed solemnly, "I, Li Gui, swear by my honour as a shooter that I will carry out the terms of this agreement diligently, else my parapsychic abilities will vanish completely."

Sha Ya nodded, satisfied. Swearing by one's honour as a shooter was a significant gesture that no one would think of going against.

Ye Chong released Du Feng to Li Gui after that.

To Sha Ya, the matter was considered settled. Ye Chong felt differently. He was certain that the soldiers would return as he had seen the strong desire for revenge in Du Feng's eyes. Ye Chong was familiar with that look. He wanted to just kill Du Feng and end the whole incident. People like the Brigade Commander would always be a threat, waiting to strike again.

However, not was the right time. He looked up at the fighters circling his manor. If he had set up his defence system here, Ye Chong was confident that he could take down all those aircrafts.

Time was running short. Ye Chong felt danger pushing itself closer and closer towards him.

...

Du Feng had awakened halfway through their journey back. He was not injured. He walked beside Li Gui, looking exasperated. The entire army moved without a sound. They were still shaken by losing so many comrades in a very short time.

Li Gui understood Du Feng. He advised his friend, "Don't be consumed by revenge. Those two were too strong, we can't take them on. There's nothing we can do about our defeat."

Du Feng kept silent. He knew that. Even so, regret and hatred occupied his thoughts. If only he did not allow those soldiers to enter the manor, all of this could have been avoided. If only he was not so hasty, choosing to investigate the newcomers' background instead of rushing things, they would not have suffered like this.

80 lives were lost! Du Feng's heart ached at the thought. Many of those soldiers were even more senior than him.

There was nothing he could do now. If he had not been caught, those two would definitely have been shot to bits by the fighters! However, even this last hope of revenge was lost. Du Feng regretted it so much that he wanted to cry.

Having worked together for so long, of course Li Gu knew what Du Feng was feeling. He consoled the man, "Just let go of this matter. We'll take it slow, there will be a chance for revenge later." Both he and Du Feng could not just nothing about the 80 lives they had lost.

But ... But ...

Du Feng recalled Li Gui's vow, and felt dispirited. He was a shooter too. Of course he knew how important that vow was. He would never seek revenge while having Li Gui pay the price.

Li Gui seemed to read Du Feng's mind. He smiled and said, "It looks like you guys still haven't understand what I meant by my vow earlier. I am not useless, but I will never become a shooter again. If that's the case, what does it matter if I lose my parapsychic abilities?"

Du Feng stopped in his tracks. He felt a deep sadness rising in him. He wanted to say something, but could not find the words to express himself. His eyes turned moist.

"Gui, do you think we're right or wrong in doing this?" After staying quiet for a long time, Du Feng asked suddenly.

Li Gui considered that for a moment and said, "Old Du, it's

pointless to think about being right or wrong at this point. Now that we're here, it's hard to say who's right or wrong. Indeed, we've been reckless, but now that so many of our brothers have died, how can we be at peace if we don't do something for them?"

"Right," Du Feng lowered his head and responded quietly.

Suddenly, a soldier came rushing towards them from the front.

"What is it?" Du Feng and Li Gui were the first to notice that something was wrong.

The soldier approached the two men and reported through gasping breaths, "Sir, the – the Legion Legate and his troops are here in our camp. He asked to see both of you immediately."

...

With the soldiers gone, Ye Chong no longer felt like going to sleep. Sha Ya was the same. Kristen surprised everyone by sleeping through the entire ordeal.

Hence, Ye Chong stayed up thinking about how to quickly set up a defence system that could protect them as soon as possible. Sha Ya practised meditation in her own space.

As the day grew brighter, Ye Chong took Sha Ya and Kristen with him and entered Su City again. He decided to start building the manor's defence system starting today.

Ye Chong already had information on around 3,112 items in his database. These were all common materials that did not cost much. With better understanding of the properties of these materials, he was now better equipped to choose the best materials for different purposes. Knowing which material and which properties were suitable to build weapons, for example, was basic and necessary knowledge.

Ye Chong quickly made a shopping list. Money was not an issue to him now. He also ordered raw materials that could only be found in Su City, since there was greater variety here. Ye Chong's

database was about to expand again.

With the raw materials handled, Ye Chong moved on to the next step. He flew a huge transport aircraft to his manor.

This was Ye Chong's first time seeing a transport aircraft. It was large and bulky, slower than a fighter, but steadier.

By the time he landed, the materials were all delivered and stored in the empty buildings. These elegant and refined buildings were now reduced to warehouses.

Kristen wanted to see how Ye Chong built his weapons, but was dragged away and locked outside instead.

It had to be done. Ye Chong knew that his methods must be kept secret!

Chapter 534: Fish and Net IV

Most of these materials were made of wood. Their physical uniformity was somewhere between skeletal materials and metals. They were better than skeletons, but not as uniformly dense as metals. This meant that the production of larger wooden structures can be automated, and Ye Chong need only tweak the smaller details later. The modern technology embodied in the photon processor provided a great convenience in this process. Ye Chong can design the structure on the photon processor, and the intelligent machines would process the raw materials according to the design's requirements. This saved him a lot of work.

Unfortunately, Ye Chong had very few photon processors with him. Only a few machines and some auxiliary mechs had photon processors, and all of them had only average performance. The only advanced photon processor he had was in Celest, but it was just a single one. Ye Chong needed Celest around him at all times for safety reasons, and could not leave it in his base for research purposes.

Ye Chong was skilled in mechanical work, but he only had a shallow understanding of photon processor technology. However, photon processors were exactly what he needed right now, and highly advanced ones in fact. Only powerful photon processors can perform accurate modelling and help him find his way home.

The only plan he had now was to build a bio-photon processor. However, bio-photon processor technology was one of the main content in the chip that Kui gave him. It would not be easy to understand it. He would need to learn things step by step. Fortunately, Ye Chong was not lacking of patience.

Recent events had also prevented him from focusing on the material in Kui's chip. He knew perfectly well that only by having the strongest weapons could keep his enemies at bay.

Hence, he decided to build a massive defence system this time.

...

Jay's fleet, the mysterious force that everyone had once put their hope on, had vanished as mysteriously as it first appeared. Soon, people began to forget about it. It was mentioned less and less in conversations. All eyes were now on Arwa's group.

Compared to Jay, Arwa seemed to have received Heaven's blessings. The man now had the strongest power in Gray Valley. Xiao Wan may not be a great leader, but she was a good diplomat and an excellent second in command. Arwa and Xiao Wan had now switched roles, as the woman had asked to serve as his second.

Indeed, Xiao Wan was competent in her role. She reorganized the existing organizations that had asked to join them so that Arwa may focus on military affairs. The truth was, Arwa had benefited the most from Jay's prophecy. He was able to showcase his military prowess to everyone in Gray Valley and built a solid reputation for himself.

He was much luckier than Jay. In fact, luck may have played a very important role in how events had played out.

After he successfully made his escape from the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, he had become a man of no equal, and Gray Valley's last hope. Thus, when he spread the word to recruit new members to his fleet, many had replied back enthusiastically. These smaller players all converged into his fleet. Many young people had come to protect their families and their homes. His fleet expanded rapidly. Almost all of the resources available in Gray Valley were now in his hands.

True to his reputation as a genius tactician, Arwa managed his fleet effectively. He led the growing fleet, absorbing new members day after day. The fleet made a roundabout way towards the vicinity of Kasent and began to fight back. They would engage in surround and destroy operations or more aggressive attacks. The

war was hard, and they lost many times more lives than the red-tailed beasts that they killed due to a general lack of battle competence. Nevertheless, they won in the end!

They managed to stop the red-tailed beasts from advancing beyond Kasent.

Gray Valley was now separated into two regions, with Kasent marking the border. Compared to Ye Chong, Arwa was much more experienced in tactical operations.

Here in the vicinity of Kasent, the fleet had built many garrisons to defend the waves of attacks from the red-tailed beasts.

To prevent the red-tailed beasts from repeating their strategy, Arwa had placed many surveillance stations around the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

The situation quickly stabilized. The victory had boosted Arwa's reputation even further. Gray Valley's residents worshipped him. However, Arwa did not relax himself. No one knew how long their current stability may continue. When the red-tailed beasts were finished devouring all the food within their territory, they would surely all converge at Kasent. That will mark the beginning of the final battle between both sides.

By then, who knew how much the red-tailed beasts would have evolved? Arwa could not say for sure, but he knew that the red-tailed beasts would definitely be much stronger than they were now. For now, they needed time to gather their strength. All the mech pilots needed training, especially the younger ones. He must do everything do to train them all to become close range mech pilots.

Factories churned without stopping, as they were all lacking precious resources for war.

No one complained. They all knew lay ahead if they lost this war. The Gateway that led to He Yue Galaxy was still under the control

of the red-tailed beasts. Fortunately, the Gateway was too narrow for the red-tailed beasts to conquer the other galaxy as well. If they lost Kasent, the entire Gray Valley would fall into enemy hands.

This was a battle they cannot afford to lose. Desperation drove these people to do extraordinary work.

Everyone, be it human or red-tailed beast, was racing for the finish line. Could the humans gather enough strength and resources for war before the red-tailed beasts absorbed all the energy and metals and underwent evolution?

The first one to strike would have the upper hand.

...

Planet Spectre was busy with life when Jay and Arwa were both trying to cross the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. As time passed, the place reverted to its usual peace and quiet, as people no longer felt interested in the desolate and uninhabited planet.

No one knew that the seemingly lifeless planet was actually harbouring a starship fleet – Jay's mysterious fleet.

They had taken over the Research Consortium's former headquarters. Mu/Shang became the fleet's commander. Some in the fleet were unhappy with this change, but the earliest members of the fleet all remembered the mysterious partner of Sir Jay. With Shang's inclinations, he was able to solve these kinds of issues much more easily than Ye Chong.

The Research Consortium had left behind a highly advanced base with wonderful facilities. The things stored in the warehouse showed how rich the Research Consortium once was. These resources were more than enough for the mid-sized fleet. Even though Ye Chong had already emptied the central laboratory, the other labs still had valuable treasures of their own.

As the fleet settled down in the base, its members trained hard every single day.

Aside from close range mech pilots, Mu also began to train long range mech pilots. The Research Consortium's long range weapons were proven to be effective against the red-tailed beasts. Moreover, long range combat was Mu's specialty. Had Ye Chong not been so devoid of any talent in this field, he would have become an extraordinary long range mech pilot.

The current Spectre was now true to its legends. All mechs and starships that went close to the planet would mysteriously disappear.

All of them were kidnapped by Mu/Shang. Not everyone agreed with this forceful recruitment, but Shu had supported the idea adamantly, while Xi Qing agreed quietly. Thus, this kidnapping plan developed into a full blown operation. In just a short time, the fleet had grown three times larger. Those who were kidnapped had all chosen to stay when they found out that this was Sir Jay's fleet.

Compared to close range combat, long range combat training was easier. Besides, the grandmaster Mu himself had crafted a comprehensive training routine for the mech pilots. Xi Qing and Shu were in awe of their new leader.

Here in the base, everyone trained hard for the day when they would once again show themselves to the world and restore Sir Jay's glory.

...

Du Feng asked in a slow voice, "What you're saying, Sir, is that we should just let this go? That's 80 lives of our own! Sir, when has the 1st Legion ever suffered this much humiliation?" Beside him, Li Gui thought of adding something too, but did not say anything in the end.

Sitting in front of Du Feng was the 1st Legion's Legate, Ming Xiao. Ming Xiao was about 60 years of age. He had a clean shaven face, which made him look like an ordinary thin elderly. Sitting next to Ming Xiao was a middle aged man with a cold,

expressionless face.

Du Feng had explained the entire incident to Ming Xiao, but Ming Xiao had forbidden them from exacting any kind of revenge. Du Feng could not understand it. He knew his superior well. The thin old man was in fact quick tempered and highly defensive. Du Feng had thought he heard it wrongly when the old man asked him to let the matter go.

Ming Xiao's face turned solemn as he glared at Du Feng and said, "It's not so simple. Let me tell you, I still haven't forgotten that you started this whole debacle. Humph, I'll deal with you later."

Du Feng could read between the lines that the old man was keeping him out of trouble, but the thought of those 80 men he lost just made him furious. He wanted to continue arguing, but suddenly felt a strong tug from behind him. He turned back and saw Li Gui shaking his head at him.

Du Feng trusted Li Gui, and knew that the man would not try to harm him.

"Alright, you're both dismissed. I have things to discuss with Sir Huang," Ming Xiao waved them off in dismissal.

Outside the office, Du Feng looked frustrated. He confronted Li Gui antagonistically, "Gui, why'd you stop from me from speaking just now?"

Li Gui was familiar with his friend's temper, and was not offended. He smiled and said, "Come on, don't XXXXX. What kind of man yells at his best friend?" Du Feng felt embarrassed. He knew that he was in the wrong.

Li Gui immediately turned serious and said, "Indeed, the situation's not that simple. Think about it, the Legate pays a sudden visit. That in itself is unusual. Besides, didn't you see how Sir Ming Xiao's expression changed when you were explaining how we got into trouble with the three newcomers? Maybe the Legate is

here because of those three."

Du Feng recalled what happened in the office and felt riled up again.

Li Gui took a glance at Du Feng and continued, "There's something else. That Sir Huang was not properly introduced to us, but even Sir Ming Xiao seemed to offer him great courtesy. He must be someone important. You remember also, don't you, that Sir Huang seemed very interested when you were recounting the incident. He even interrupted you to clarify some details. I suspect that he is here because of the new owners of the manor."

"Those men came with Sir Huang, what do you think of them?" Li Gui asked abruptly to Du Feng.

Being absorbed in Li Gui's narrative, Du Feng replied without thinking, "They're strong!" Du Feng remembered all of them clearly. They all looked expressionless, but Du Feng could tell that those few men were definitely competent.

Li Gui continued asking, "What Level do you think those shooters are?"

"That's hard to say," Du Feng replied hesitantly.

Li Gui gestured the figure eight with his hand.

Du Feng looked shocked.

"Of course, it's just a guess, but I think they're not far from that," Li Gui added.

Du Feng kept silent. Li Gui's words were often prophetic.

"Certainly, these men are not your average shooters! No, they must be exceptional! Not everyone can command the powers of these men. Think about it, even our Legion has only but a few of them. Exactly three of them, I'm sure you know. But that Sir Huang has brought seven of them with him. That's eight in total, including Sir Huang himself. Who can possibly command a force

like this?"

Li Gui did not hesitate to surprise his friend, "Only His Majesty!"

Du Feng was stunned.

He never imagined that those three commoners could gain the attention of the King.

Li Gui went silent. He knew that he needed to give Du Feng time to absorb the news. In fact, Li Gui could still feel his own heart thumping heavily as he too was surprised by his own conclusion.

Nevertheless, being seasoned as he was, he quickly composed himself.

He tried to delve deeper. There was something missing, he felt.

Suddenly, Li Gui's eyes lit up in realization.

"I understand now!" Li Gui's exclamation shook Du Feng out of his confusion. He quickly asked, "Gui, what is it?"

"I think I understand what Sir Huang and his men are here for. His Majesty must be very interested in these three commoners, that much is obvious from the people he had sent here. However, if the King only wanted to protect the manor owners, he could have just sent guards to the manor directly. Instead, the King had ordered Sir Huang to visit our camp on the quiet. This seemed to suggest something to me," Li Gui's eyes shined with wisdom as he explained.

"And what is that? Gui, stop keeping me in suspense!" Du Feng asked anxiously.

"I think that His Majesty has sent Sir Huang here partly to protect them. On the other hand –" Li Gui hesitated to continue.

"Just tell me!" Du Feng urged him.

Li Gui looked around them. Seeing that they were alone, he whispered, "On the other hand, I suspect that if those three people try to leave, or do anything suspicious ..." Li Gui made a cutting

motion with his hand.

Du Feng felt his heart went cold.

"It's only a suspicion. Who knows what the real story is? But if things are really as I suspected, then that will be the only time for us to make our move," Li Gui said, his eyes glistening brightly.

"What if they do nothing?" Du Feng asked.

"Then we will do the same!" Li Gui looked at Du Feng and replied, slowly but firmly.

Both men lapsed into silence.

After a moment, they both received orders from the Legate to return to the office.

They exchanged a quick look before making their entrance.

Sir Ming Xiao had reverted back to his inconspicuous look. The sharpness in his gaze had faded.

"Listen to me now, both of you. If I hear that you get into more trouble again, humph, I'll not let you off so easily! I think you've missed a good ol' whipping from me, you *sses! Humph!" Sir Ming Xiao berated them loudly.

Du Feng and Li Gui had both trained under the Legate personally. He would not go easy on them both. Both of them had received his whipping when they were younger, when he was only a Brigade Commander. Despite the fierce berating, it was clear that he meant to keep them out of harm's way.

"Yes sir!" Du Feng and Li Gui replied together, touched by his concern.

Ming Xiao nodded, satisfied. "That's more like it! Come, let me introduce to you, this is Sir Huang!"

Du Feng and Li Gui quickly bowed in greeting. Sir Huang took a glance at Ming Xiao and lifted his chin a little, "I've heard that you two are Sir Ming Xiao's beloved soldiers. Indeed, you look like

excellent military men. My men and I will be staying here for some time, I thank you for your hospitality," he spoke coldly. His words were cordial, but it still brought a chill to his listeners.

The two men in question quickly returned the gesture, despite their discomfort, "You're most welcome, Sir Huang. Please let us know if there's anything we can do for you!"

Sir Ming Xiao smiled and said, "Sir Huang's position is unique, so you can stop with your guessing. As long as you obey his orders diligently, His Majesty will not forget your services. The camp will operate normally, as Sir Huang will not be interrupting with your affairs. However, any orders from Sir Huang must be carried out to the letter, understand?"

Both men accepted their orders in quiet surprise, "Yes sir!"

Sir Huang finally broke into a thin smile, but it only brought a sinister look on his face.

Chapter 535: Expenses

Ye Chong took the laser gun that he had just completed and tried to aim. The truth was, Ye Chong did not improve very much in long range attacking, mostly because he did not train himself in it. He had chosen to specialize in close range combat since the very beginning. However, this did not mean that Ye Chong was completely clueless about long range combat. On the contrary, he had studied the art deeply.

Long range attacks will be the main threat of close range mech pilots. Every close range mech pilot would study about long range attacks to learn how to avoid them.

Ye Chong was no exception. However, unlike other close range mech pilots, he was lucky enough to have an expert, Mu, to help him out. Mu had in fact given Ye Chong a comprehensive training program for long range mech pilots.

Shooting was basic knowledge for all long range mech pilots, but was not enough by itself. Knowing how to predict a target's movements was also crucial to become a competent long range mech pilot. Unfortunately, Ye Chong had stumbled at the very beginning of the list of prerequisites. That was why he always thought that he lacked talent in long range combat.

Shooting was the most basic requirement. Ye Chong had never mastered it before, but could he have changed over time?

Ye Chong lifted the laser gun and aimed, narrowing his eyes like a hawk. Every object in the room showed up clearly in his vision. He had hands that were as precise as mechanical instruments, allowing him to make the slightest adjustments in any way, even though these movements were still new to him.

Fire!

Ye Chong steady arms did not move at all when his right hand

pressed onto the trigger, and a laser beam shot out of the gun, hitting squarely on a black dot on the wall. Puff! A thumb-sized hole was left on the wall. Sunlight from outdoors flooded through the hole.

Sha Ya arrived quickly, in an alerted state. She was puzzled when she saw nothing was wrong, but left Ye Chong to his devices.

Ye Chong looked at the hole in the wall, momentarily taken aback.

Was that it?

Surprised by his action, Ye Chong lifted the gun and fired a few more times. All of them resulted with the same accuracy.

Ye Chong stayed where he was, stunned.

In fact, the result was hardly surprising. Compared to his younger self on the trash planet, he had grown so, so much. He had improved in many respects, such as muscular control, observational skills, and understanding in combat. If his abilities were represented as numbers, his current numbers had increased many times over compared to when he first started. This kind of gradual change often happened unnoticed. If the current Ye Chong were to try his hand in the training routines that he had practiced with before, he would find himself managing all the harder parts with ease. Ye Chong was surprised but also happy with the massive changes within him.

Ye Chong may not have focused his training in long range combat, but many of the close range combat skills he picked up were also essential for long range combat.

However, this was still the first step. Shooting on a fixed target was the most basic training for every long range mech pilot.

Ye Chong soon realized the reason for his improvement. He was not overwhelmed by happiness due to his achievement, but instead felt a little melancholic. All his efforts throughout the years, his

hard earned victories through sweat and tears had allowed him to become who he was today. His hands had moved faster and faster; his combat skills had developed from the initial mimicking to a Jie expert's level; he had started mech piloting with the most basic Raven, and ended up with Celest today; he had also learned alchemy, and mech manufacturing, and more ...

Who could understand the hardships that he had endured throughout it all?

And who had he become today? "What's with me being so emotional today?" Ye Chong laughed at himself mockingly.

Soon, Ye Chong relieved himself of these emotions. He had never allowed his own emotions to trouble him for long. All feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or tiredness would come to pass. In the end, the only way to solve any problem was calm thinking, courage in making decisions, and the perseverance to carry out the necessary actions.

Ye Chong was now still a beginner in shooting. If he wanted to improve himself, he must train hard. His current level would not be threatening in actual battle. However, Ye Chong did not dismiss this skillset. Even though his shooting could not be very helpful in actual battle, Ye Chong realized that it presented a new pathway for him.

Indeed, he could not be like the shooters in this world who could aim with their parapsychic sense. However, he had something they did not have – holographic scanning. Of all the long range mech pilots he had encountered, none of them could aim through mental control. Nevertheless, they were still excellent combatants. Even Xi Feng Tribe's mech pilots were aided by holographic scanning systems.

He had an advantage in shooting distance.

Ye Chong finally had a few peaceful days for himself. Unexpectedly, the soldiers did not come knocking to seek revenge.

In these few days, Ye Chong drew up a plan for the main structure of the manor's defense system.

12 cannon arrays did not feel like enough for the huge manor, but they would at least provide some form of protection against aerial threats. The holographic scanning system for the manor was already set up. With the manor at its center, Ye Chong now had a 120-kilometer radius of land under surveillance.

The military base was only 40 kilometres away from Ye Chong's manor. This allowed Ye Chong to feel safer. Knowing the enemies' every movement was a desirable outcome.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong did not lower his guard. There was no huge response from the camp, but it would still send scouts to spy on them regularly.

Ye Chong did not react to that. As long as the soldiers did not invade his space like that night, he would not retaliate. This kind of spying activity was useless against him. Unless they had a highly advanced mech like Mu and Shang, they would not penetrate the thick walls around the manor. If they tried to trespass the manor, Ye Chong's defense system would identify them and initiate an attack.

Ye Chong was now more than capable of setting up an effective defense system. Every weapon was placed strategically and well hidden. The rich greenery on the manor's land and the uneven terrain was also to his advantage.

Ye Chong built a good number of heavyweight firearms in a few days, with enough time in his hands. Aside from the 12 cannon arrays, he also installed more than 600 laser guns all around the manor. Besides the high accuracy firearms, Ye Chong also created a new kind of weapon that he called the Hive.

Each Hive was a set of laser shooters arranged into a matrix, like a beehive. Each Hive could fire up to 144 shots simultaneously, where each laser beams was separated from the ones around by 20

centimetres. This was a weapon designed to take on the more capable shooters. The attack had larger coverage, so that even if the enemies noticed the attack with their parapsychic sense, they would not be able to avoid it. Besides, the Hive could adjust its shooting angle through the control photon processor.

The only disadvantage of this weapon was its high energy consumption. Nevertheless, given how energy rich materials come easily in this world, and at affordable prices, it did not really matter.

Ye Chong was inspired by the G-Z laser gun structure of the Research Consortium when he developed this new weapon. The final product was devastatingly powerful with the excellent raw materials he found on this planet. Even an aircraft would be destroyed by this weapon.

Hence, Ye Chong modified some of the Hives to have larger spaces between the lasers. These modified ones would be used to target aircrafts.

Now, Ye Chong's defense system was making headway. He could continue with his research, being safer against external threats.

...

Sun Sieha was very busy. There were too many matters that required his attention. Despite all the preparations he had gone through since he was a child to inherit the throne, and despite his long experience in governance and military affairs, he still found himself strained by the workload. He could now appreciate the pressure that his father once faced.

Nevertheless, all the work did not make him forget about the weaponsmith called Ye Chong.

The mysterious young man was such an interesting character! Whenever he had a moment's idleness, he would think about that cold young man. A smile would come to him whenever he thought

about how he was forced to an impasse that day. Being a proud man, he would only ever think favorably of talented and skilled people. However, he quickly dismissed all of these subjective thoughts and emotions. He was King, and he needed to consider every matter from the country's perspective.

Sun Sieha's expression reverted to his usual coolness. He considered for a moment, then summoned, "Ask Master Karu to see come see me!"

"Yes, Your Majesty!" A guard hastily left the King's study.

Sun Sieha tapped his finger rhythmically on his desk, thinking about the report he had just received. The report informed him of the conflict between the 1st Legion's Du Feng and the cold weaponsmith. Du Feng's defeat did not surprise him. If the weaponsmith could not hold his own against the Brigade Commander, he would not have been able to force Sun Sieha to an agreement that day.

How would this conflict affect future events? This was what he needed to consider.

Just then, a guard interrupted him, "Your Majesty, Master Karu is here."

"Let him in," Sun Sieha said.

Master Karu was 77 this year, and one of Eastern Cloud's most prestigious weaponsmiths. Sun Sieha had gotten to know the man when he was young. He was confident of the man's skills.

Master Karu entered the study and bowed to Sun Sieha, "Your Majesty, you summoned me?" Master Karu's hair had all turned white. He looked sharp despite the deep wrinkles sprawled all over his face. He was obviously unimpressed by Sun Sieha interrupting his work.

Sun Sieha smiled, unoffended, "Master Karu, please have a seat. I have something to ask you."

Master Karu nodded and sat down.

"Have you seen the cannon array, Master Karu?" Sun Sieha asked.

When Karu heard the question from Sun Sieha, his eyes lit up immediately. He replied quickly, "I have, I have! I've done a round of tests on the cannon array. It is truly powerful! Where did you obtain this powerful and huge cannon array, Your Majesty?"

Sun Sieha smiled and did not answer him immediately. Instead, he continued calmly, "I have seen the abilities of that weapon, but, from your professional viewpoint, Master Karu, you must surely understand more about it. Could you explain the weapon to me briefly?"

"I see," Master Karu nodded, his eyes shining enthusiastically as he spoke more quickly, "Begging Your Majesty's indulgence, but this officer of yours has never seen anything so powerful and yet so lightweight. It's built with advanced technology, and the design is unique. I have never heard of anything like it. The most interesting part of the cannon array was its internal structure. I believe that it is designed based on knowledge that is far beyond everything we have learned in the field. It's much smaller than our main cannons, and much lighter. Some of our more powerful aircrafts can probably lift these cannon arrays. If we can produce these cannon arrays on a larger scale, our military strength can be improved by at least five-fold. However, I regret to inform Your Majesty that despite all the hours of studying the weapon, there are still many aspects about it that I cannot figure out."

Sun Sieha was at first overjoyed, but his mood took a nosedive at Master Karu's final sentence. "Master Karu, do you think you can reproduce this weapon?"

Master Karu confessed, "Your Majesty, there are still many things that I do not understand about this weapon. The weaponsmith behind this cannon array must be truly extraordinary! May I

enquire as to how Your Majesty came to obtain this weapon?"

Sun Sieha had hoped that Master Karu could at least reproduce the cannon array, but his hopes were dashed. He was heavily disappointed, and replied dismissively, "I bought it."

"You bought it?" Master Karu was shocked. "What country could possibly come up with such advanced weaponry?"

Sun Sieha shook his head and explained, "It's not a country, just a weaponsmith."

Master Karu was even more surprised now. "Which weaponsmith? Who is the person behind this masterpiece?"

"His name is Ye Chong."

"Ye Chong? I have never heard of the name," Master Karu sighed, "To think there could be such a talented man in this world. This Master must be skilful enough to start his own school of teaching. What a capable man, but unknown to the world. He must not think highly of fame and status. Where is this great man now? If it pleases Your Majesty, I would like visit him as soon as possible to know more."

"Great man?" Sun Sieha had an odd expression his face.

"What is it, Your Majesty? This Master is many times more capable than this officer of yours. I am more than willing to admit that," Master Karu said solemnly.

Seeing Master Karu's seriousness and his white hair, and comparing the old man with the cold young man, Sun Sieha could not help but explained, "Master Karu, this great man you speak of is in fact only in his twenties."

"Impossible!" Master Karu rejected the idea immediately. He looked straight at Sun Sieha and said, "Your Majesty, please do not jest with me in this matter. It is not funny."

Seeing how serious Master Karu was, Sun Sieha could only

clarify, "I'm not lying. He really is only about 20 years old. He had come to Su City with me, and now lives in the vicinity of the capital."

Master Karu saw that Sun Sieha was being honest. He muttered to himself with an unreadable expression, "20 years old! 20 years old! Can there really be a person who was born a genius?"

He gathered himself and asked urgently, "Please introduce me to this weaponsmith, Your Majesty."

Sun Sieha thought of Ye Chong's cold and uninviting face. He frowned and said helplessly, "Let's set this matter aside for the moment. We'll talk about it later. Don't worry, Master Karu, I will put you in touch with him."

Master Karu was puzzled by Sun Sieha being troubled by the matter. He asked gently, "With such a talented man by your side, why would you feel troubled, Your Majesty?"

"I am worried about the cannon arrays."

"If that weaponsmith is willing to sell, then Your Majesty can always purchase more. What's there to worry about?" Master Karu could not understand.

"He's only willing to sell two of them every month. Moreover," he took a glance at Karu with a pained expression and continued, "Each cannon array costs 20 million ao."

"20 – 20 million ao ..." Master Karu was speechless.

Sun Sieha nodded and added, "That's 20 million ao for each cannon array. It's alright to buy a few more of them, but it will be impossible to arm the entire military with it."

"This price ..." Master Karu could not say another word for a long while. Finally, he managed, "What a sky high price! I have inspected the cannon array. Based on the materials used, it should cost no more than 8 thousand ao."

When Master Karu revealed this, Sun Sieha felt even bitter about it. He was silent for a long moment before groaning angrily, "What a thief!"

Master Karu mused quietly, "It's expensive, but the technology is worth the price. Your Majesty, you should be careful, if another country is able to procure one of these weapons ..."

Sun Sieha nodded, understanding him. "Don't worry, I have an agreement with him. Eastern Cloud has exclusive rights to purchase his weapons."

The guards in the Royal Palace saw a strange scene today. As Master Karu left His Majesty's study, he looked listless, muttering to himself, "Just 20 years old ... A genius ... 20 million ..."

The day also became even more difficult for the guards because of their King. After Master Karu had left, His Majesty looked so grim that the sky seemed to darken as well. All the servants and guards behaved warily as the atmosphere in the Palace turned heavy with tension.

Chapter 536: Kristen's Project

There were many, many things that Ye Chong needed to attend to.

Shooting practice was absolutely necessary. If he could become an effective long range attacker, he would no longer be so helpless against shooters, especially when he was in his mech. This skill was crucial for his survival, and must be prioritized above all else.

Modifying his base was a massive and long term operation. With a basic defense system in place, his safety was at least not a concern. This job can be delayed for later.

Studying the contents of the three chips from Kui was an equally long and laborious effort. There was so much knowledge in those chips that Ye Chong could not possibly hope to master them all in his lifetime. Nevertheless, he had no choice, for he needed to get back home. How could he stay here? Mu, Shang, Rui Bing, the Sang Tribe ... Ye Chong suddenly realized that he was no longer the isolated and lonely young man he once was.

He must return, no matter what it takes! Ye Chong tightened his fists, his gaze determined. No matter how long it would take, no matter how much work it would require, he will return to them.

Compared to these three tasks, the rest were not as important. He did not need to socialize or bow down to another person's wishes. He only needed to do his research in his base, by himself.

Ye Chong exhaled deeply. There was work to be done. It was no use for him to ruminate on his thoughts.

Ye Chong thought that the planet he landed on was very interesting. The place had an abundance of natural resources and lifeforms. There was enough energy here to mass produce energy crystals. This was the reason native plants were highly compatible with pure energy, and why the planet had highly advanced energy

manipulation technology. Nevertheless, Ye Chong found that the technology here had developed in an unusual way. Their theories and other fundamental research works were much too primitive compared to energy manipulation technology.

There was also a very significant weakness in this place – there were no metals. The plants here had excellent physical properties, but they were still plant based material, limited by what plant cells could achieve. There was no expertise like alchemy to harvest the plants in a more scalable manner. In fact, the natives gathered their plant materials by simply harvesting them from nature. Ye Chong thought it was a very backward method.

Ye Chong's extensive knowledge allowed him to assess the local technology from a wider perspective.

Of course, in the end, all of these were not relevant to him. He could not be bothered to get involved. What he needed to do now was improve his own situation through the resources available to him. Abruptly, he had a feeling that this was just like the game he had once played with Mu and Shang. He was biding his time in a secluded place, strengthening himself, until the time came for him to strike out.

Ye Chong reminisced on his difficult but fulfilling days. A thin smile brightened on his face, as he felt a warm, eager sensation bubbling within him.

Let them see, he will be back soon enough.

...

A month passed quickly enough. It was time for Ye Chong's trade with Sun Sieha.

Sun Sieha came as planned. Together with him was an old man with white hair – Master Karu.

This was the first time for both of them in visiting Ye Chong's manor. Master Karu looked around curiously. Most of the

buildings had been modified by Ye Chong such that they no longer fit into the leisurely nature of the manor. Sun Sieha controlled himself more, but his occasional wandering gaze betrayed his own curiosity towards this place.

Sun Sieha was naturally accompanied by his guards. However, he also knew that Ye Chong did not like many visitors. Thus, he only brought five of them. The way they conducted themselves suggested that they were all Level 8 shooters.

"You're here," Ye Chong greeted the King nonchalantly.

Sun Sieha did not behave like the King he had become. He only nodded back in an equally casual manner, "Yes, I am."

That the two of them would speak to each other so casually surprised Master Karu and the guards. Master Karu knew Sun Sieha well enough to know that the King was a very strict person who would only be more amenable towards truly capable people. However, this degree of friendliness was a little too much ...

The guards were also shocked. Their immediate suspicion was that the young man might be His Majesty's illegitimate son! However, when they saw Sha Ya, they immediately tightened their guard. A Level 8 shooter can pose a serious threat to His Majesty! They quickly surrounded the King to protect him.

Sun Sieha was annoyed by their overreaction. He waved them away unhappily, "Stand down."

He then turned to Ye Chong with a smile and asked, "Are they ready?"

"Yes," Ye Chong nodded and pointed towards two huge boxes casually placed under a tree. The boxes were elegantly designed, caved with many intricate patterns. These two boxes were Kristen's work. As Ye Chong's first assignment to her, she dared not slack on her job. She chose the materials herself, and added many decorations on the side. The boxes ended up looking like fine

artwork.

Sun Sieha took a glance at the two boxes and nodded. Two guards immediately went for the boxes.

"Pay up," Ye Chong put out his hand without delay.

Sun Sieha looked a little helpless as he replied, "Here you go."

Master Karu watched their interaction with amusement. He had never seen anyone speak to the King like this. The young man did not seem afraid of His Majesty at all.

"This is Master Karu, Eastern Cloud's most prestigious weaponsmith. He asked to be introduced to you, so here he is now," Sun Sieha made the introductions.

Master Karu smiled gently, his wrinkles showing underneath his smile, "I wouldn't call myself Master in front of this great talent, Master Ye. I am here to learn from you."

"You are too kind," Ye Chong responded out of courtesy.

Sun Sieha said to them, "Enjoy yourselves then. I won't be bothering you. Sigh, what a carefree life you have, I'm just jealous of you."

Sun Sieha then took his guards with him and left Ye Chong's manor.

Master Karu asked carefully, "May I visit your workshop? I've tons of questions regarding the cannon array you made."

"Sure," Ye Chong replied after some thought.

Ye Chong brought Master Karu to a red and white colored building. "This is my workshop," Ye Chong introduced. Having learned his lesson, Ye Chong had prepared this particular building for his cover. Everything inside were normal equipment that locals used to build their weapons. In fact, Ye Chong rarely came here himself. It was Kristen who frequented the place often. She had bought most of the equipment in here.

Thus, when Ye Chong brought Master Karu into the building, he surprised Kristen, who was working inside. The woman was quick to notice that the old man was no ordinary person.

"Teacher," Kristen greeted Ye Chong, as was proper. Ever since she witnessed Ye Chong's prowess in battle, she never behaved arrogantly towards him again.

"Ye Chong's student?" Master Karu thought to himself, intrigued. Kristen's beauty also led him to consider a possibility – could this cold, young man actually be interested in beautiful women? The thought came and passed.

"Mm," Ye Chong nodded in acknowledgement. He introduced the old man to Kristen, "This is Master Karu."

"Mas – Master Karu!" the words stumbled of Kristen's mouth. She could not believe her eyes.

Master Karu was pleased by Kristen's reaction. He laughed it off, "I didn't think that Master Ye would have such a beautiful student. You make me jealous."

"Kristen, my student," Ye Chong introduced Kristen briefly, completely unmoved by them. Regardless of why Ye Chong had accepted her as a student in the first place, he was actually impressed by her. Kristen was talented, hardworking and determined. Ye Chong did not have much time to teach her. Usually, he would just pass some basic knowledge for her to study by herself.

Kristen did not complain about his teaching methods, but instead focused on absorbing new knowledge given to her.

Ye Chong always had a soft spot for hardworking people.

"Are you really the one and only Master Karu?" Kristen was overjoyed. Every weaponsmith would know the name of this old man. As Eastern Cloud's iconic weaponsmith, he was an idol to many, including Kristen. Seeing her long admired idol made

Kristen a little emotional.

"Haha, I don't think anyone would be interested in pretending to be me," Karu laughed it off. He thought the girl was amusing.

His attention turned to a few items on the desk, which looked like unfinished work.

He asked warmly, "Are these yours?"

Kristen blushed and nodded almost imperceptibly, "Yes." She felt embarrassed to let the honorable Master Karu to see some unfinished work of hers. For someone of her level, Master Karu might just be left unimpressed ...

Master Karu picked up one of them and inspected it carefully. He wanted to know how good this young man's student was. A student's abilities were usually a good reflection of the teacher's. Of course, there were exceptions to the rule.

Master Karu nodded, "Not bad. This energy activation chip's structure is interesting. Your workmanship is good. Ah!" Suddenly, the old man gasped in surprised.

An energy activation chip was every weapon's core component. It was used to extract energy from energy crystals. This energy was then focused using other components into a directed beam of energy, capable of damage. The energy activation chip was second in the hierarchy of weapon components that required great skill. The component that demanded the most skills was the focusing component.

Master Karu had spent more time than both Kristen and Ye Chong combined in building weapons. Of course he could identify all the elements necessary in an energy activation chip.

This particular chip looked strange. It was only the size of an almond nut, with a complicated internal structure. However, Master Karu could make out every detail of the structure.

"What energy grade is this energy activation chip for?" Master

Karu asked Kristen warily.

Kristen answered without hesitation, "Three million Lux."

Master Karu could barely contain his shock as he repeated shakily, "Three million Lux?"

"Yea," Kristen answered, feeling worried. The energy activation chip that she built was much smaller than those commonly available in the market, but the great Master Karu might not find it impressive enough.

What a humiliation! Kristen felt her cheeks burning up. She stole a glance at Ye Chong and found him looking pretty much expressionless, not the slightest bit angry with her. Kristen groaned inside. She could never make out Ye Chong's moods. Her previous teacher had always minded his image very much, especially amongst others in the same trade. If she happened to embarrass him in front of his colleagues, she would suffer for sure!

Karu's eyes flashed with fear. Making a three million Lux energy activation chip at this small size was a difficult feat. An energy activation chip had a very complicated internal structure. Any kind of miniaturization was hard to achieve. Besides, the higher the energy grade, the larger an energy activation chip must be to accommodate. In his own workshop, an energy activation chip designed for three million Lux would have been at least the size of a fist. This particular chip was only the size of an almond!

The seasoned Master Karu did not let his expression betray his thoughts. He smiled at Kristen and said, "Three million Lux, that's a heavyweight there. What do you plan to install it in?"

Kristen's mature, womanly face turned shy as she replied, "I was thinking of making a laser gun." Ye Chong had built two laser guns at five million Lux earlier. One was for his own training, and the other for Sha Ya to replace her gun made of speckled blue fir.

Kristen wanted one as well, but Ye Chong thought it was

unnecessary, and did not make one for her.

Hence, Kristen thought of building a high energy grade laser gun for herself. These days, all the new knowledge had inspired her greatly to try out some things. Of course, building a five million Lux weapon was beyond her. In the end, she settled for three million Lux.

The highest energy grade laser gun one can get from the market was at 1.5 million Lux, and at a sky high price. Kristen was not confident of building this three million Lux weapon, but she wanted to at least try it out. Master Karu was a legendary weaponsmith. Kristen thought that, if she could do it, surely it would be a piece of cake for Master Karu!

A laser gun!

Master Karu was shocked beyond words. How can a three million Lux energy activation chip be used for a laser gun? If Ye Chong had not been standing calmly beside him right then, Master Karu would have thought he heard it wrong.

Kristen looked embarrassed, but Karu could see that she was serious about her work.

No wonder the energy activation chip was made to be this small. The weird internal structure was probably why the chip could be made this small.

Karu felt an impulse to disassemble the energy activation chip to its basic parts there and then and study its design. Fortunately, he was a seasoned man. He suppressed his emotions quickly. A quick glance to the side showed Ye Chong looking calm as usual. Master Karu managed a smile and said, "Master Ye is indeed outstanding. The chip's structure is unique." In fact, he felt that the energy activation chip was in a league of its own. However, it was only natural for a weaponsmith who could build the cannon arrays to be able to come up with something like this.

Ye Chong shook his head and clarified, "The design is hers." He fixed his gaze on the energy activation chip for a moment. There was still much room for improvement, but he thought Kristen's proactive attempt a worthy and meaningful effort.

Karu was now shocked beyond words. Could it be that even Ye Chong's student was as capable as this? Minimizing the size of an energy activation chip had always been one of the difficult problems in weapon building. Now, however, this young man's student was able to solve that problem by herself, without help from her teacher.

"This ... This is ... " Karu's thoughts slowed down to a halt. For the first time ever, he considered the possibility of having grown too old himself to catch up.

Master Karu quickly gathered himself and laughed, "Haha, looks like our country, Eastern Cloud, will have another Master in its grace. Master Ye has an excellent student!"

Kristen was overcome with joy, having been complimented by the great Master Karu. She felt like she was walking on clouds. At the same time, she felt greatly relieved. She stole a look at Ye Chong, but the man still looked as expressionless as ever, not showing any signs of happiness or contentment.

"If this is your student's work, perhaps I may be able to purchase the rights for this technology on behalf of Eastern Cloud?" Master Karu inquired carefully, looking at Ye Chong.

Ye Chong did not care. "It's hers, you can just discuss with her."

Karu's wrinkled face stretched into a wide, cunning grin. He said to Kristen, "Dear Ms Kristen, we are willing to offer 30 million ao to buy the rights for this energy activation chip technology. You will receive five percent of every energy activation chip sold for 20 years from now. What do you say?" Karu could tell from experience that this chip would allow their country to be at least three decades ahead of other rival countries in terms of

technology. The price he offered for this advantage was not high at all.

Kristen felt a little dizzy. She stared at Karu in amazement, then looked to Ye Chong's calm face for help.

Chapter 537: Everyone Has Their Own Problems

Kristen was not unfamiliar with trading, but the largest amount that she had ever dealt with was two million ao, and that was when she asked to be Ye Chong's student. She did not know how to handle this huge sum. Naturally, her thoughts went to her teacher, Ye Chong.

Ye Chong was experienced in dealing with huge sums, but usually the numbers mean nothing much to him. He was not experienced, nor was he expert in it. However, there was one thing that he was better at than Kristen – no matter the situation, he could still remain calm.

When Ye Chong saw Kristen looking to him for help, he considered the offer by Master Karu for a moment and said, "The price is acceptable, but with some alterations. She will get 10 percent from every three million Lux graded energy activation chip made. For similar models at other energy grades, she will get five percent for each of them."

Ye Chong knew what Kristen's energy activation chip meant to Eastern Cloud. Once they fully integrated this technology, their weapons will immediately reach a new level of power, and the first people to own these weapons were surely the military soldiers! In summary, Eastern Cloud's military was about to get a massive upgrade.

As a man who had led a whole fleet before, Ye Chong knew that replenishing an army's resources would cost a lot. If it were the army of an entire country, the amount would be staggering. The process of upgrading would be gradual, but the total expenditure remained the same.

As long as they continued to offer better and better technology, improving the energy activation chip to other energy grades and

for more kinds of weapons, they would be able to benefit a whole lot more! How much more could they make? Ye Chong could not offer an estimate.

In the short term, their income might not seem significant, but two or three decades later they will reach an impressive sum. Ye Chong would leave this place sooner or later, but Kristen would still be here, and Ye Chong knew how to alter the terms to her advantage.

Ye Chong spoke calmly, but his words did not invite arguments.

Master Karu's face twitched. The man was a thief! It may not seem obvious, but Master Karu understood the plan behind Ye Chong's suggestion. Compared to his original proposal, they would now earn eight times more. In particular, "similar models at other energy grades" meant that as long as they were manufacturing energy activation chips with similar structure, at any energy grade and for weapons, Kristen would be able to benefit from them all.

Karu knew the value of this small energy activation chip, or he would not have felt the urgency of acquiring rights for the technology. He believed that by acquiring the rights for this chip, they would be able to use it for all their weapons, regardless of energy grade. "What a sly b*stard!" Master Karu thought to himself, wincing at the huge cost it would take. He could be grateful that the country was paying for it, instead of him.

Besides, Karu could not do anything against the young man's calm and confident expression. If it was anyone else selling the energy activation chip technology, they would surely be enticed by the 30 million ao offer. However, this young man's student here ... Did she lack money? Her teacher would get 50 million ao every month for the cannon arrays – it was robbery!

These two were not in desperate need for cash. However, His Majesty would probably not agree to coerce them through other methods.

Karu hesitated for a moment before finally agreeing, "Very well!" Did he have a choice? He saw the glazed look in Kristen's eyes and could not help but sighed to himself – when this young girl looked back at this agreement many years from now, she would appreciate how her teacher had helped her earn so much more.

What a fortunate lady!

The formalities of the deal were left to Karu and Kristen. Since it was possible to negotiate, Karu would not consider using other less courteous means. Since he knew the magnitude of financial impact this agreement would have, he drafted out the contract meticulously to avoid future disputes.

Kristen signed the contract without fully understanding the details. She was completely overwhelmed by the 30 million ao offer in the agreement. She still remembered clearly how giddy she felt when her teacher had sold off a cannon array at 20 million ao. Nevertheless, the money was not hers. This time, she was unprepared for the 30 million ao offered to her. It had momentarily left her stunned.

"Would Master Ye be available in the near future?" Master Karu asked respectfully.

Ye Chong nearly said no, but then he hesitated, and asked, "What is it?"

"There will be a weapons design contest soon, perhaps Master Ye would be able to volunteer some time to serve in the contest's judge panel," Master Karu asked expectantly. If he could get this heavyweight to become a judge, the contest would surely be something to look forward to!

"A weapons design contest?" Ye Chong inquired.

Master Karu smiled and explained, "The King organizes the contest every four years as a way to encourage weapons development in Eastern Cloud. There will be many impressive

weaponsmiths who will partake in this contest. There are many parts to the contest, such as live demonstration of the weapons and comparisons between theories. In the past, each contest has served as a platform for many new ideas to be introduced to the public. These young contestants may not be excellent weaponsmiths, but they can offer some bold ideas. These ideas are very valuable to us. Besides, this weapon design contest coincides with the largest and most well attended weapons trading market in Eastern Cloud. A good weapon is often expensive, so many shooters from other countries will visit the market to explore their options," Master Karu tried his best to persuade Ye Chong.

Ye Chong considered the offer for a moment, then nodded and said, "Alright." Ye Chong had initially thought to decline, but then felt that it would be a good opportunity to understand the general state of technology in this world. Understanding the level of technology of Eastern Cloud, and perhaps even of the entire planet, would definitely provide him with great insight.

Karu was overjoyed. "Excellent! With Master Ye as part of our judge panel, the coming contest will surely leave its mark in history!"

Ye Chong waved off the compliment flatly, "You're too kind, Master Karu."

Karu left Ye Chong's manor with a sense of accomplishment. There were still many questions that he wanted to ask about, but today's outcome had far exceeded his expectations. That tiny energy activation chip can surely bring about a revolution in Eastern Cloud's military weapons! He looked forward to it.

On the other hand, today's trade agreement had also allowed him to get to know the cold, young man personally. Knowing an expert weaponsmith like him might just pay off in future.

Karu respected the young man, but also felt that he could not hope to reach the same level as him. Even his student could

improve an energy activation chip to this extent. Surely her teacher could do far more! The man was a mystery, but Karu was certain that the young man was far more capable than he was, and probably the most skilled weaponsmith in the world. Once upon a time, Karu had thought he had reached the pinnacle of weapons making, but now he found himself still at the bottom of the hill, looking up hopefully.

Nevertheless, the young man's cold and emotionless face dampened Karu's excitement.

What a difficult person to read! Karu dared not play any tricks with the young man. He could finally understand why the King felt so dissatisfied but helpless against him. In comparison, his beautiful student was more naive. Perhaps she would offer a point of vulnerability.

Of all the intel His Majesty had informed him of the young man, most of them were about his student, but there was almost nothing on the young man himself. They only knew that he came from Dual Forest. Both Karu and Sun Sieha were relieved that Ye Chong's student, Kristen, was a bona fide Eastern Cloud citizen.

...

Kristen watched as Master Karu left their place. She was still feeling high from the exchange. Ye Chong had returned to his own building. That was a restricted area for Ye Chong only. Even Kristen was not allowed inside.

"Time for practice," Ye Chong thought to himself as he took in a deep breath. He picked up his gun smoothly, his eyes sharp as knives. The gun fired again and again, always hitting the moving targets that flew around in the building.

After this long period of training, Ye Chong had improved a lot compared to before. He had once studied the long distance combat training manual. Unlike before, he could now complete the trainings much more easily. His muscles moved according to his

will. His eyes were sharper than ever. Moreover, his calculation skills aided him in shooting moving targets.

Still, he was only taking beginner steps towards becoming a long range mech pilot. There was still a long way ahead of him. Nevertheless, it was already a huge improvement for Ye Chong. At least the laser gun no longer served a decorative purpose in Ye Chong's hands. Ye Chong did not hope to become a shooter like the ones in this world. It was simply impractical for him to aim for that.

Besides, Ye Chong felt that shooters were only powerful midrange combatants. Only a mech fitted with a holographic scanning system could be considered a true long range attacker. On this planet, 30-kilometer midrange shooters were the main highlights, but Ye Chong thought the distance still too restrictive. Besides, an average shooter's parapsychic sense could only expand out to six or seven kilometres away.

Parapsychic abilities strengthened a shooter's combat abilities, but it also restricted a shooter's potential.

Ye Chong believed that the advantage of long range attacks was not fully realized in shooters.

Celest was not significantly faster than its opponents, but it could veer and turn much easily than others. Ye Chong learned from his previous battle experience that he could use this advantage to shake off a shooter's parapsychic sense. However, once he became a true long range attacker, the hunter would become the hunted.

The problem of fighting using Celest was thus solved, but Ye Chong was not easily satisfied.

The test results for all the items he had bought in Su City were ready. All this information was entered into Celest's database. Since he could not build photon processors yet, the combat mech Celest was used a temporary storage drive.

Ye Chong studied the numbers and picked a few interesting materials.

Candygrass secreted a very sticky slime. The slime was chemically stable, suitable to be used as a binding agent. Weapons here commonly used a kind of binding agent derived from the Japonicum plant, but the slime from candygrass was 15 times stronger than the former. Ye Chong called it candyglue. He also found that this candyglue could be used for binding metals together, with far better results than traditional soldering. However, the only drawback was the slime secretion from each candygrass plant was very little. This was why the ingredient never became mainstream.

It was not a problem for Ye Chong. As an excellent alchemist, this was an interesting problem to look into. He just needed some time.

The Grimacing Creeper was also a cheap and neglected species. Its surface layer had a special component that allowed it to absorb parapsychic waves. This was one of Ye Chong's most important findings so far. He was overjoyed to find the natural anti parapsychic property. Ye Chong had always been vexed with the shooter's parapsychic waves. If he could extract the component to make anti parapsychic products, Ye Chong was confident that no aircraft would ever be a threat to Celest again.

So much to look forward to!

There was work to be done, though. Ye Chong was mentally prepared for them. No matter how hard this was going to be, he must produce this anti parapsychic material.

At the same time, things were not going well for Du Feng. He was plagued with nightmares of that horrible night where his comrades died right in front of his eyes, and the shadow that lurked in the dark. Often times he would be woken up from his dreams, finding himself covered with sweat. However, there was nothing he could do. Sir Huang was always either going about his

business secretly or staying in his room. Du Feng could not glean his intention.

On the other hand, Du Feng was facing problems at work. Many of the new recruits could not keep up with the physical training. His camp had never suffered so much outside of actual combat. He was also helpless against this issue.

"Gui, what do you think we should do now? We can't go on like this. I've been to the patient ward yesterday. Those little brats have all collapsed, injuring their muscles. They won't be getting up jumping for at least a couple of weeks," Du Feng sighed worriedly as he watched the few remaining new recruits on the training ground, pushing themselves beyond their weak bodies.

Li Gui looked concerned as well. "You're right, Old Du, it's bad. I went to the medical officer yesterday to get to know more. The officer said that these guys are all too weak, plus our training is too intense for them to keep up."

"I guess we're out of luck for the friendly match between the new recruits," Du Feng said, dejected.

Li Gui shook his head, "That's not quite the case. I've heard that almost all the military camps have the same problem with their new recruits. Some of the camps even lost two thirds of their recruits. I think that His Majesty will have to be informed of this problem soon."

Du Feng looked up at that, "That may be a good thing. His Majesty is wise, he will not let this problem remain."

...

As Li Gui expected, the issue was brought to Sun Sieha just two days ago.

Sun Sieha looked deeply concerned. He was upset with having this issue so soon after he took the throne. As someone who had trained with the military since he was young, Sun Sieha thought

highly of the military, more so than his father. He knew that if the issue was not resolved soon, the young shooters will suffer many casualties once they were in the field. As a King who intended to expand his kingdom to the entire world, this was a problem that must be solved.

The military department held a meeting to discuss the issue, while Sun Sieha listened patiently to the suggestions from his military officers. All of them agreed that that the military's unreasonable prerequisites for new recruits had caused the problem they faced today. Besides, it had become a norm to expect shooters to prioritize parapsychic training over physical training. All the military officers expressed their concern over the matter.

Sun Sieha understood that this was a problem that needed solving, but altering a worldview that had long gone unchallenged was not an easy task. He could have used the law to change the prerequisites for new recruits to encourage physical fitness, but Sun Sieha was not naïve to believe that it would work straight away.

As a worldly ruler, Sun Sieha knew exactly how hard it was to change a person's beliefs.

They could only be persuaded, not forced. Sun Sieha labored over the problem, trying to think of a solution.

The sky darkened. Time flowed pass unnoticed while Sun Sieha was deep in thought. Suddenly, Sun Sieha thought of Ye Chong, the best expert in close range combat.

Sun Sieha's eyes lit up in the darkness. If anyone were to see him now, they would surely be reminded of the fact that their King was a level 8 shooter as well.

In just three days, Sun Sieha made his second visit to Ye Chong's manor.

Chapter 538: Isolated Training

Sun Sieha left Ye Chong's manor in a good mood. People began to wonder why. In Su City, Sun Sieha's every move was under silent scrutiny. The councilors and officers were all trying to figure out their new, strict ruler. That His Majesty had visited the same place twice in three days and returned to the palace in a good mood each time was of course highly suggestive.

The more experienced people had already gotten hold of information regarding Ye Chong and his group, including their conflict with the 1st Legion. Details of that exchange were scarce, but it was said that 80 soldiers had lost their lives, that Du Feng had been held hostage, and that there was a Level 8 shooter in the manor. These three points were all shocking by themselves. To think that the owner of the manor had such power!

Besides, it was now known His Majesty's former butler, Ba Luomeng had served as witness to the purchase of the manor. This information suggested once again of the close relationship between the King and the owner of the manor.

The nobles, on the other hand, were surprised by the 1st Legion's reaction to their defeat.

Every noble knew of how Eastern Cloud's 1st Legion was too proud and overbearing. Their Legate, Ming Xiao, was a short tempered man. He did not bother to be respectful to anyone but the King himself, and easily took offense. Nonetheless, since he was a military top dog with rows of medals to show it, everyone in the government, be it the Prince or the most favored councilor in the cabinet, would be very mindful in dealing with him.

Contrary to their expectations, Ming Xiao had kept quiet about the matter, and did not retaliate. The arrogant and trigger-happy 1st Legate behaved like peacekeepers, never speaking of the battle again. Even Du Feng himself stayed passive.

This was shocking to all those who were familiar with the 1st Legion. Who in the world were they dealing with? There was not enough information to glean the manor owner's identity, but one thing everyone could agree to was this – no one can afford meddling with the man in question.

A mysterious manor, owned by a mysterious man – Ye Chong did not know that his name had already reached the ears of the top officials in the Eastern Cloud government. It was a piece of intel that was spread quietly but surely.

For now, however, everyone focused on two immediate matters – the King's birthday celebration three months later, and the weapons design contest a week after the celebration.

The first event was important, that went without saying. With a new ruler on the throne, it was a golden opportunity for the officials and nobles to leave a good impression. Those who performed well would be rewarded accordingly, but those who did not will suffer certain consequences. His Majesty, being the combat enthusiast, had also passed down the order to organize a nationwide combat tournament at around the same time. Anyone who won, no matter their profession, age, or methods, will be granted the title of Master, and could even have an audience before the King. If the winner was interested in becoming a government official, His Majesty would grant the position immediately. Of course, a huge monetary sum would be part of the grand prize.

The councilors were all unsettled by this. The tournament was not as simple as it seemed to be. Since the tournament would be just three days away from the quadrennial weapons design contest, Su City would be flooded with an unprecedented volume of visitors. The weapons design contest was attended by weaponsmiths from around the world. Some of them would even arrive at Su City a month ahead of time. For those who were looking for a better weapon, there was also the huge weapons trading market for them.

The councilors must first deal with the problem of security. With so many skilled weapon users entering Su City at once, they must ensure the safety of Su City and their King. This was the first issue that they must deal with.

No one knew why His Majesty suddenly fancied having this combat tournament. They all knew how this tournament would attract battle enthusiasts across Eastern Cloud like bees to honey. Perhaps Su City might not even be able to accommodate everyone by then.

Nonetheless, there was nothing they could do about it. His Majesty was intent on carrying on the event, giving the order without prior discussion. Those who tried to speak up were immediately discouraged by the cold look from their King. Besides, they had no reason to speak up. It was His Majesty's birthday celebration. Would it not be suicidal to be a killjoy right now?

Thus, they could only try their best to handle the situation.

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Ye Chong frowned. Evern since Sun Sieha left his place, he fell into long period of deep thought. His shooting exercise had to stop. He was preoccupied with the discussion with Sun Sieha that day. If it really worked, then an important step in his plan would be completed earlier than expected. This was very important to him.

However, Ye Chong was not confident of it. This gave him a headache.

There were more people sneaking around the manor recently. Sha Ya had expressed her interest in the matter. However, Ye Chong ignored them. As long as they did not step into his property, he would let them be. If anyone tried to enter his manor, they will not leave the place alive.

Ye Chong called both Sha Ya and Kristen to him.

Sha Ya and Kristen shared a look of puzzlement. Ye Chong rarely

asked for them.

"I'm about to undergo three months of isolated training. Kristen, I've given you everything you need to study in this period. You need only learn to understand them. Remember, you must understand them thoroughly. I will test you after my isolated training is complete. Sha Ya, you will join me in my training."

Sha Ya could not hide her surprise. Kristen acknowledged his orders. She will need a long time to figure out what Ye Chong had given to her. She did not mind Ye Chong's isolated training, for the man rarely came out of his building most of the time anyway.

On the other hand, Sha Ya was completely taken by surprise. She did not expect to be his training partner.

Ye Chong had arranged for this isolated training with a very specific goal in mind. He was preparing for Eastern Cloud's national combat tournament two months from now. Sun Sieha had visited him last time to discuss this matter. He hoped that Ye Chong would enter the tournament. Ye Chong had declined immediately at first. To him, time was too precious to be wasted on unimportant things like this.

However, Sun Sieha had come prepared. He made an offer that Ye Chong could not refuse. Soon, the ever pragmatic Ye Chong agreed to the King's terms.

Since he had agreed to participate, he must make the necessary preparations. Ye Chong had not come up with an effective strategy to fight against highly skilled shooters, and it bothered him. While making his entire body vibrate could shake off a shooter's parapsychic sense, a Level 8 shooter would be immune to this move.

A Level 8 shooter's parapsychic waves felt strong and dense. Ye Chong's quick movements could not hope to disrupt the waves.

Ye Chong had prepared one of the buildings in the manor for this

isolated training. Of course, the training ground was essentially an empty building, the floor covered with a layer of wooden planks.

"This is your weapon," Ye Chong said and passed a small and silver laser gun to Sha Ya. The silver material had a good texture. The gun was simple, but with a streamlined design. Sha Ya felt it fit comfortably into her hands. She instantly fell in love it.

Ye Chong saw Sha Ya caressing the gun appreciatively. He said, "This laser gun is only at 10 Lux, harmless against the human body. If you're interested, I'll modify the gun after this training to about three million Lux. Take it as compensation for being my training partner. What do you think?"

"Done!" Sha Ya agreed immediately, feeling pleasantly surprised.

"The gun is no different than your average laser gun, aside from the energy grade."

Sha Ya loved the feel of the gun. She looked even more absorbed in the weapon as she tossed the silver gun around in her hands.

"You need to attack me with all you have. The laser gun can fire a thousand times after each recharge. All you need to do is to fight me like in actual combat. Do you understand?" This was Ye Chong's plan. He could not think of anything else. Perhaps through actual combat, he would be able to figure out some countermove.

Back when Ye Chong was negotiating with Sun Sieha in Yedda city, he had already had this idea when he asked for a Level 8 shooter. If Level 8 shooters were a kind of commodity, they would be very precious and invaluable. Without Sun Sieha's assistance, Ye Chong would find it very difficult to get a Level 8 shooter's help.

Initially, Ye Chong did not see finding an effective way to against strong shooters as a very high priority. It could be done later. However, Sun Sieha's visit had pushed this problem up the priority ladder.

Sha Ya nodded, understanding Ye Chong.

They stepped away from each other to gather distance, then Ye Chong signalled for Sha Ya to start.

Suddenly, Ye Chong felt an extremely powerful parapsychic wave locking onto him. He felt it immediately. It was like being watched by a snake, and it made him highly uncomfortable.

He moved! Ye Chong leapt away, bouncing off the wooden planks on the ground.

Fwoosh fwoosh fwoosh! Three laser beams hit Ye Chong between the eyebrows, throat, and heart, respectively. Ye Chong looked perturbed. If Sha Ya was using a normal laser gun, he would already be dead three times over.

Fwoosh fwoosh fwoosh fwoosh fwoosh fwoosh! Another six shots were fired, all of them landing on Ye Chong's body. Ye Chong looked simply terrible.

...

Kristen's life did not change much due to Ye Chong's isolated training. Whenever she passed by the building that functioned as the training ground, she would always hear non-stop explosions or sounds of impacts. Kristen was initially shocked by the noise, but had soon grown used to it.

Kristen shook her head and muttered, "They're both crazy, I'm not gonna be a part of it." She turned back and headed towards her own weapons workshop. After she sold her patent to Master Karu, her confidence got a boost. This encouraged her to try even more new things. She would try her best to understand the new knowledge she got from Ye Chong through experimentation.

Kristen could see that Ye Chong was uninterested in weapons. He was a mystery to her, but all the knowledge he imparted were solid gold. Kristen knew that this was an opportunity that should not be wasted, so she worked hard to make it count.

...

As the King's birthday celebration got nearer, more and more people came to Su City. The combat tournament that His Majesty announced earlier was now a hotly discussed topic in Eastern Cloud. Perhaps the true experts, like Level 8 shooters, did not need to prove themselves, but the tournament was very attractive for younger people who wanted to test themselves.

It had been very long since Eastern Cloud had a large scale combat tournament like this. The only way to become a government official of Eastern Cloud was through the military, starting from the bottommost rung. Since His Majesty would be watching the entire tournament, it was a splendid opportunity for the younger generation to gain fame and status!

Unlike in Su City, Ye Chong's manor was relatively peaceful.

In the training building, Sha Ya had felt growing admiration towards Ye Chong, who was trying hard to execute evasive manoeuvres. She had never seen anyone persist for so long through harsh training like this. Even she was starting to feel tired. She had not stopped shooting with her laser gun yet. Who knew many shots she had taken? After so many days, she had exhausted enough energy crystals to make a huge pile.

Nevertheless, Sha Ya held on. Every time she saw the tenacious figure trying to avoid her shots, she felt invigorated and motivated to carry on. For two whole months, she had not rest more than necessary. She aimed and fired every single day through sheer determination. Her hands were aching by now. After shooting so frequently and intensely for a long period, the act of shooting felt like second instinct. She could not fire much faster than before. The tiny silver gun had become a part of her, obeying her every thought.

She Ya realized that her stagnating skills were finally improving once again.

What about her training partner? She Ya wondered, looking at the shadow of the silent but determined man.

Chapter 539: Breakthrough

Ye Chong looked exhausted. Even his strong body was pushed to the limit as he trained intensively every single day for so long. In these 80 days, Ye Chong had to run almost constantly to avoid the laser beams. He ran and ran like a leopard in the forest, dodging the laser beams that never stopped coming from Sha Ya. In the end, he could only hold one thought in mind – run for his life!

Ye Chong's explosive power was impressive. Sha Ya had seen that before, but she now found his stamina equally formidable. He could move quickly in the training ground throughout the entire day, never slowing down. Being a Level 8 shooter, the quick movements and afterimages did not affect her performance much, but staring at someone moving so quickly for so long had also affected her. After the first day, Ye Chong was so tired he could just collapse onto the floor, while Sha Ya could only see everything vibrating in her vision.

On the second day, Sha Ya changed tactics. She closed her eyes, since her parapsychic sense was more reliable than her vision at this range. The only thing that surprised her was how Ye Chong had returned to the training ground on time, as though nothing much had happened the day before.

The first thought that came to Sha Ya was – was this person really human?

Naturally, Ye Chong defaulted to running on this day. Ye Chong ran wildly in the small training ground, but every time he did a quick veer, the laser beam would still find its mark. Nevertheless, he continued running undeterred.

At the end of the day, Sha Ya could hear and was appalled by Ye Chong's heavy panting. Ye Chong no longer moved so quickly and easily. His every step and every turn became heavy stomps on the wooden planks beneath him. A few cracks would show on the

reinforced wooden floorboard. Sha Ya knew that by now, Ye Chong was running on his last reserves.

Whenever this happened, Sha Ya would start counting down. However, Ye Chong was able to hold on until the end of training. By then, Ye Chong was already drenched in sweat. A thick vein throbbed violently on his forehead.

For 80 days, the routine repeated itself.

Sha Ya found it difficult to imagine how a slim body like his could store so much energy!

She found that the young man before her had shattered her beliefs on what was possible. Ye Chong's intensive and perhaps masochistic training won Sha Ya's complete respect and approval.

This did not mean that Sha Ya was starting to have feelings for Ye Chong. It was in fact a feeling of respect from one strong combatant to another.

Shooters were sensitive to their surroundings. Their parapsychic sense allowed them to notice the details in their environment. As a Level 8 shooter, she could sense the tiniest details around her.

Ye Chong's breakthrough happened on the 57th day. The number did not mean anything in general, but it held a special meaning for Sha Ya. On this day, Sha Ya had witnessed a breakthrough of the strongest combat expert in Eastern Cloud, and perhaps in the entire world. The man had finally found a way to shake off a Level 8 shooter's parapsychic sense.

She did not know he achieved it, but Sha Ya could feel the moment when her parapsychic sense lost contact with Ye Chong. She quickly tracked him down again, but Sha Ya knew that a person like Ye Chong would have noticed the slip on her side, no matter how temporary it was.

Sha Ya was right. Later, Ye Chong became harder and harder to lock on to. Sha Ya found it harder and harder to keep track of him

with her parapsychic sense.

Sha Ya knew that Ye Chong was not yet a threat to the authority of shooters in general, but from that moment on, the dominance of shooters would gradually fade over time.

Ye Chong was very, very tired! However, he could not afford to be careless. He knew that this opportunity was hard to come by. Every second was precious to him. He must quickly familiarize himself with this feeling, so that it could become instinctive to him. Only then could he fight on even ground with Level 8 shooters.

At the beginning, Ye Chong did not really have a plan. He could not do anything against parapsychic waves. Hence, he decided to just let Sha Ya attack him. To defeat an enemy, one must first understand them. Ye Chong endured Sha Ya's powerful parapsychic waves every day as he tried his best to avoid her attacks that never seemed to miss the mark.

The method was effective. Soon, Ye Chong grew familiar with the feeling of being targeted. In the beginning, he would always feel highly threatened whenever he was locked on by the parapsychic waves. Later, he gradually got used to the feeling.

A month later, Ye Chong could already sense minute details in Sha Ya's parapsychic waves. If Sha Ya's parapsychic waves were like water, then Ye Chong was beginning to understand the physical properties of the waters. This was a priceless advantage. How often was it that another combat expert as good as he was could train with a Level 8 shooter continuously? Every Level 8 shooter was a master in their own right. They had good reason to be prideful.

This was something very important. Ye Chong was not an actual mentalist. He knew the logic behind the skill, but he could not have a more personal and fundamental understanding of it, not like Huang Baiyi or Sha Ya. Now, however, as he continued to train

with Sha Ya without stopping for weeks, the shooter's powerful and repeated demonstrations allowed Ye Chong to familiarise himself with parapsychic abilities at an astonishing rate.

Once he had a better understanding of parapsychic abilities, Ye Chong's rich battle experience, calm mind and Jie level skills allowed him to find a way to conquer his foe in a relatively short time.

When Ye Chong tried it for the first time, it was actually him using one of his special skills as a Jie expert. He had tried it before, but to no avail. When he tried it again this time, he could see in his vision a strange curving line of blue that blinked quickly out of existence. Ye Chong had never seen a wavy line like that before.

Before this, Ye Chong used his special ability, he would only see straight or angular lines, but never curved.

Ye Chong following the blue curve instinctively. In that moment, he felt a relief over his entire body, like a man walking in water suddenly finding all the water drained away. Ye Chong would never forget that sudden moment of ease.

In that moment, Ye Chong felt a sudden burst of joy in his heart. As he continued to push his limits every day in his training, he was straining himself both physically and mentally near his breaking point. Now, all the tension in his body was released. Overwhelmed by his emotions, Ye Chong quickly lost control of this state of freedom, and was locked on by Sha Ya again.

From that moment on, Ye Chong was able to avoid more of Sha Ya's shots. Ye Chong soon found the key to escaping Sha Ya's parapsychic waves – he must be calm, as calm as the waters. This was not difficult for him. In fact, it was his strength.

As Ye Chong grew more familiar with Sha Ya's parapsychic waves, the mysterious wavy line appeared more frequently. They looked different each time. In the end, Ye Chong could easily move through Sha Ya's parapsychic waves. There were more lines in his

vision now, giving Ye Chong more options.

Ever since he attained this ability as a Jie expert, Ye Chong seldom spent time on it. Ye Chong had many ways to do battle, and this unique skill had only been used a few times.

The skill was crucial to escaping Sha Ya's parapsychic waves. Ye Chong never expected it.

Why did it not work before, but turned out to be so effective right now? Ye Chong could not understand. Later, Ye Chong realized that he did not actually understand much of this unique skill of his. He had never thought to question the logic behind his skill. When he first discovered what he could do, Ye Chong found it hard to believe. He had thought that anticipatory skills like this would have been more reasonable to be found in strong mentalists like Huang Baiyi. It did not make sense to appear in him, someone who had no talent in mentalist abilities. Nonetheless, since he rarely needed to use the skill, Ye Chong did not think of it further.

This breakthrough changed Ye Chong's perspective of his unique skill. It was not anticipatory, like a mentalist's abilities, but more like a vulnerability pointer, the result of heavy computation! This was why the skill did not work at first. As Ye Chong grew more familiar with Sha Ya's parapsychic waves, his brain was able to process all the information and determine the weakness of her senses.

From this point of view, his unique skillset did not seem so mysterious after all, but Ye Chong finally understood how powerful it was. With his usual abilities, Ye Chong would not be able to determine the weakness in Sha Ya's parapsychic sense, but this unique ability could.

When using this unique skill, his brain could process information close to a hundred times faster.

What a terrifying ability!

Judging by the outcome, the isolated training was a success. Not only did Ye Chong get the breakthrough that he desired, his strong body had also improved significantly after the long training. After three days of rest, Ye Chong's body was restored to top condition. He realized then that the energy in his body made him feel very comfortable.

"I didn't think you would actually succeed. Congratulations," Sha Ya spoke with a low voice. She congratulated Ye Chong sincerely. Ye Chong's determination and hard work could sometimes squeeze a little sympathy out of her stone cold heart. In these 80 days, she had witnessed how Ye Chong had trained himself. The floorboards had all crumbled into tiny little pieces evenly across the training ground. Step a little harder, and the boards would disintegrate into dust. This was all the result of Ye Chong's training.

After the isolated training, Sha Ya finally realized how Ye Chong earned the skills that did not fit with his age.

Ye Chong had already recovered from the ecstasy he had felt earlier from his success. He accepted Sha Ya's congratulatory words calmly, "Thank you. And thank you for training with me all this while. I would not have succeeded without you." Ye Chong meant what he said. Without Sha Ya's serious and active participation in their training, he would not have been able to come up with his countermove in such a short time.

Sha Ya smiled, and her face lit up instantly. She spoke with a sigh, "I have never seen anyone so crazy and yet so calm like you. No need to thank me. The training has helped me a lot as well. I'll have to thank you for helping me improve myself."

"Your laser gun will be done tomorrow." Ye Chong had a very straightforward way to expressing his gratitude.

"I'll hold you to it, then. But I'm curious, how did you do it?" Ever since Ye Chong first slipped her senses, Sha Ya had tried to change her own parapsychic waves to keep him targeted, but Ye Chong

could always find a way to escape her. Slowly, it became harder and harder to keep Ye Chong locked. Now, it was simply impossible.

In fact, Sha Ya was also worried. The current Ye Chong was a real threat to shooters. If Sha Ya was not on Ye Chong's side ...

Ye Chong replied with a weird expression, "I'm not sure."

Sha Ya nodded in understanding. She knew that the man was not trying to hide anything. At their level, there were many things that could not be explained.

On the second day, Ye Chong presented the silver laser gun to Sha Ya. Kristen had also handed over the money from three months' worth of cannon arrays to Ye Chong.

Ye Chong's life returned to normal. Without the intense training, his daily routine went on a slower pace.

A breakthrough in hand-to-hand combat was great news for Ye Chong. It meant that as long as a shooter was not in an aircraft, they would not be a threat to him. Hence, Ye Chong now need to consider the problem of aircrafts. If he could solve that one as well, then his two most urgent problems would be dealt with.

In this world, aircrafts were like mechs.

As a Level 8 shooter, Sha Ya's fighter aircraft was very advanced. It was custom made from an aircraft manufacturer. Eastern Cloud had many aircraft manufacturers, but not many could actually design them. Feinscott Company was one of them that could. Sha Ya's fighter came from this company. It's name was Redsound.

Compared to other common stock aircrafts available in the market, Redsound had a few obvious differences. Its body was almost fully triangular. Only when one stepped to the side of the aircraft could one notice the aerodynamic curves of its two wings. In the atmosphere, the aircraft could fly as fast as Celest due to its more aerodynamic design, while Celest encountered more air

resistance.

Sha Ya looked pained while Ye Chong disassembled Redsound into pieces until he finally found the fighter's engine.

The engine's design surprised him. This was the first piece of advanced technology that he had seen in this world. The engine's design was based on very advanced principles, but not as powerful as Celest's. Local raw materials were key to high performance. They were lighter but with excellent physical properties.

Redsound was mainly made of a kind of red coloured wood, called woodrift. It was the lightest wooden material, but with equally excellent physical properties. It was also very costly. Redsound was a very expensive aircraft. Since it was very fast, and the aircraft's body very light, it was a difficult aircraft to fly. Only the truly skilled Level 8 shooters would buy this model for their own use.

Ye Chong shook his head. The aircrafts were designed for atmospheric flight only. This made them impractical. Celest may be about the same speed as Redsound in the atmosphere, but it would definitely be faster than the aircraft in outer space. Besides, Celest was much more flexible in application than Redsound. The only reason Redsound could pose a threat to Celest was a device in it that Ye Chong did not understand – the trackball.

She Ya demonstrated using the trackball. Ye Chong found the blinking lights intriguing. To him, the trackball was like a photon processor controlled by parapsychic waves.

Aiming and firing via one's parapsychic sense made it a much faster process than targeting the enemy through holographic scanning and keying in commands in the photon processor. This was why Celest was at a disadvantage against aircrafts.

This mysterious crystal-like trackball was the most powerful part of the fighter.

It was unfortunate that he did not have the least bit of parapsychic abilities to use it.

Just then, Sun Sieha arrived for a visit.

Ye Chong wondered to himself if every ruler in this world had so much time in their hands.

When Sun Sieha's gaze landed on Ye Chong, his expression changed. The bodyguards around him reacted as well.

Sun Sieha inhaled deeply and regained his composure. He smiled and said, "What a surprise, what a really pleasant surprise! You really are full of surprises."

Ye Chong ignored Sun Sieha's emotional outburst and asked him flatly, "Why are you here?" He frowned and added, "The national combat tournament is still some time away."

Sun Sieha laughed dryly and said, "Can't I just visit with no particular reason? I heard that you've been busy with training, so I'd thought of dropping by to visit you. Since you're done, might as well take you out to have some fun."

Sun Sieha's guards were already used to the way their King interacted with the young man. His Majesty never could do anything against the young man.

Ye Chong continued watching Sun Sieha quietly, waiting.

Sun Sieha was not used to Ye Chong's resistance against both forceful and friendly treatments. His eyes flashed with a cold glare, but he quickly composed himself and explained, "This is all part of the plan."

"I see." Ye Chong looked at Sun Sieha. He did not fully understand the King's way of doing things, but he knew that Sun Sieha was not the kind of person to spend time carelessly.

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Prince Desnio's mansion was located at the most prosperous area

in Su City. Music was frequently heard from inside, and people would look towards the mansion enviously. Evening balls at the Prince's mansion were well known in Su City. The place was always served by the best liquors and beautiful ladies. Of course, the mansion was also a hotspot for talents. Famous musicians would perform at the parties, where people were served by the best chefs in Eastern Cloud. It was an entertainment centre made for nobles. Being invited to the Prince's evening balls was considered as a mark of status. Only by attending the evening ball could anyone be viewed as accepted by the noble society. Many people would derive all kinds of schemes to get an invitation. In the black market, a blank invitation card to the evening ball could be sold at a sky high price.

Desnio was Sun Sieha's uncle. His title as Prince was one of great importance. Sun Sieha had once stayed at his uncle's place for a long time when he was young, and shared a close relationship with him. The Prince was of high status, but he never stepped out of line, and never involved himself in politics. Instead, he focused on organizing his evening balls.

Nonetheless, no one would forget the political influence that Prince Desnio had. Besides, the new King on the throne further improved his position. However, the Prince continued to maintain a low key presence, and never make any statements on the state of politics and governance.

Prince Desnio's evening ball was the favourite of all nobles. The place was uniquely decorated, and had an easy ambience. It was the first choice of the nobles for a place to relax and socialize.

Prince Desnio was a stout man. His face was always slightly flushed, and his voice was loud and energetic.

"Hah, Duke Warren, I haven't seen you here in a long while. Did you find somewhere new to have fun? You have to tell me," Prince Desnio laughed happily when he saw Duke Warren, and went to embrace him.

Duke Warren could not step back in time, and was quickly crushed by Prince Desnio's bear hug. He was hurting and annoyed as he said, "Not so tight, not so tight, do you want to crush this old bag of bones?" Duke Warren was one of the most influential councillors in court during the previous King's reign. His hair was all white, but his skin was smooth and well care for despite the tired look on his face.

Prince Desnio looked Duke Warren up and down and exclaimed in surprise, "What's the matter? Could it be that last night, you ..." He smiled suggestively.

"I don't have the energy for that at this age," Duke Warren smiled bitterly.

"Then what is it?" Prince Desnio asked, puzzled.

Duke Warren looked even more bitter as he explained, "It's His Majesty's celebrations. His Majsety announced a national combat tournament out of the blue. I've got all hands on board just for this, and still it's not enough. I am going crazy from the workload these few days, and I happen to have the time to visit today to de-stress."

"Why don't you have enough manpower?" Prince Desnio was baffled. As the Home Secretary, he controlled almost all the manpower available in Su City. How could he not have enough people?

Duke Warren looked positively frustrated. "The King's birthday is almost upon us. We need people to usher ambassadors from other countries, and representatives from local authourities."

"That's true," Prince Desnio nodded.

"You must have heard that the King wants to organize that d*mned combat tournament for his birthday," Duke Warren said, obviously unhappy with the decision.

"Hah, of course I have. That got me excited for a good while. It's

been so long since we did anything interesting. We're going to have a battle between the strongest in the world, isn't that exciting?"

"Oh, certainly. If I don't have to organize the event, of course I would agree to having the tournament. What an excellent source of entertainment!" Duke Warren raved sarcastically, "But of course, I am the one who's in charge of organizing this thing. By God, I swear, I've never worked so hard in my life. Look, my wrinkles are beginning to show."

Prince Desnio did not, in fact, spot any wrinkles on Duke Warren's face, but he could see how tired the man was. Prince Desnio asked, "Why'd you work yourself into a twist?"

Duke Warren nearly burst into tears as he complained, "There're too many people, way too many of them! The entire Su City's flooded with visitors from all across the country. The King's birthday celebration, the national combat tournament," Duke Warren counted weakly with his fingers, "and the weapons design competition, all happening within a week of the King's birthday. Don't you know that any one of them is enough to give me a headache? Now that I have to deal with all three together, it's just driving me crazy!"

Prince Desnio gave sympathetic look at Duke Warren and said, "My good Duke, you must take care of yourself."

Abruptly, the Duke's expression smoothened, all traces of his emotional outburst gone. He said solemnly, "Nevertheless, it is our duty as councillors to serve the King." Duke Warren looked around them as Prince Desnio gave him a look of disdain. The Duke then lowered his voice into a whisper, "Rumour has it that the King announced his decision to organize the national combat tournament after a visit from that manor. Honestly, do you think it's got something to do with the manor's owner?"

Prince Desnio smiled warily and spoke just as softly, "Hehe, I don't know. There are so many rumours going around about that

manor's owner. I'm too lazy to go through them."

"What are you talking about, gentlemen?" A loud voice suddenly interrupted them.

Both men looked up to see the 1st Legion's Legate, Ming Xiao. Even in this function, he wore a neat military uniform that stood out from the crowd. Ming Xiao approached them with a glass of red wine in hand.

"To think that Sir Ming Xiao would grace this evening ball with his presence, it's like the sun rising from the west!" That was Prince Desnio's thorny greeting to Ming Xiao.

The legendary hot-tempered man, Ming Xiao, did not take offense. He smiled easily and said, "I was bored to death recently, and heard that you serve excellent snow clams here. Since I had some time tonight, I decided to give them a try."

Warren exclaimed with bordering rudeness, "Sir Ming Xiao is famous for his discipline, but now he's slipped up for a plate of snow clams. Tsk tsk, it's not easy, not easy at all. I say, my Prince, you have to reward that chef of yours."

"That I will," Prince Desnio continued the mockery.

Ming Xiao laughed loudly, and looked at the two of them with a smile that was not exactly friendly, "Ah, one of you is the mighty Home Secretary, and the other a Prince. What could you possibly be discussing about so enthusiastically, so secretively? Could it be something of national importance? As a military man, I cannot help but feel curious."

Everyone around them was listening closely to their exchange. Sie Ming Xiao, Duke Warren and Prince Desnio were best friends when they were younger, but the gap between them grew larger and larger as they reached adulthood. The military had an unpleasant relationship with the rest of the government, especially between Ming Xiao and Duke Warren. The Prince acted as a

mediator between the two.

"I heard that Sir Ming Xiao's beloved student, Du Feng, had lost many of his soldiers some time ago. The Prince and I were thinking about paying a visit. Brigadier General Du Feng has served his country well. His soldiers must also be strong and capable. Their loss is also the country's loss. We think it prudent to express our condolences," Duke Warren said coldly.

Ming Xiao was momentarily taken aback, but he quickly regained his composure and said, "Oh, I wonder where you heard of that, Duke Warren. Sigh, the rumour mill is quite a force to reckon with! No wonder His Majesty repeatedly emphasized that spreading fake information is a serious crime. This is the reason, this is exactly the reason!"

Now it was Duke Warren's turn to be taken aback. Ming Xiao made it clear that His Majesty did not wish for this information to become widespread.

Prince Desnio looked at the two hostile men helplessly, and offered, "I say, look at you two, why so serious? Come come, let's have all have a drink!"

Just as the Prince was about to raise his glass, a servant rushed to him in a panic and whispered something by his ear.

Ming Xiao and Duke Warren were standing closest to the Prince, and they heard everything. Both men exchanged a look, then quickly broke eye contact, wearing an odd expression.

His Majesty had arrived!

Chapter 540: The Evening Ball

When Sun Sieha and Ye Chong presented themselves at the back door of the Prince's mansion, Prince Desnio and his two companions were already there waiting.

Sun Sieha looked at the three of them with their heads bowed low, and nodded, "No need to announce us." The three of them nodded in an understanding. When they saw the cold man standing beside their King, the three of them felt unsettled.

"This is ... Erm ... Master Ye Chong. He's a master weaponsmith, and a close combat expert," Sun Sieha briefly introduced Ye Chong.

The three of them realized then that the man was an excellent weaponsmith. No wonder the King treated him well. They ignored the part about him being a close combat expert. There were no Masters in close range combat anyway. The King was probably just being nice to the man.

Sun Sieha turned to Ye Chong and introduced their audience, "This is Prince Desnio, my uncle. This is Duke Warren, Home Secretary. Hmm, you can contact him if you need anything."

Duke Warren laughed and said, "Anything you need, Master Ye, just drop me a message." He was not a fool. If the King made this offer to the man, he must be a very important man to the King. It was only appropriate to curry his favour, or at least be on good terms with the man.

"This is Ming Diao, Legate of the 1st Legion," Sun Sieha pointed at Ming Xiao and said. Ming Xiao nodded at Ye Chong with a smile.

"This is the most exclusive evening ball in Eastern Cloud, where nobles and aristocrats liked to congregate. Hehe, of course, there are also many beautiful ladies. Getting to know nobles will be beneficial for you."

"I see," Ye Chong nodded and turned to leave.

When Duke Warren and the other two men saw Ye Chong, they knew instantly who he was. They thought it strange, the way His Majesty spoke to that man. A popular rumour sprang to their minds – that the young man was actually the King's illegitimate son. They all knew how strict the King was. He rarely spoke to anyone with such cordiality.

Nevertheless, they dismissed the thought immediately. Prince Desnio, as the host, took care of his guests. He quickly asked the man, "Do you need a servant to show you the way?"

"No," Ye Chong replied crisply, not mincing words.

Sun Sieha flashed a mysterious smile, but quickly reverted to his royal solemnity and said to the other three men, "All of you, meet me in the study." He then led the way himself, having been familiar with place due to his long stay with the Prince when he was younger.

Duke Warren, Ming Xiao and the Prince understood that the King had matters to discuss with them, and quickly followed him.

Ye Chong went the evening ball alone. This was a freeform function. Aside from invitation card, everything else about the evening ball was not restricted in any form. Dainty dishes and excellent liquor were served in every corner of the function room. There were also some quieter corners with plush sofas and tasty finger food, more suitable for conversation. At the centre of the room was an empty clearing, which served as the dance floor.

Ye Chong had attended events like this with the Shang Family. That experience was not particularly a pleasant one, but unlike last time, Ye Chong at least knew how to conduct himself this time.

Ye Chong took a glass of wine from one of the waiters and headed towards a quiet spot in the ballroom.

The truth was, Ye Chong had no idea what the plan was for today. However, since Sun Sieha had actually went to his place, he

decided to go along with his plan. Ye Chong did not understand Sun Sieha, but he knew that the man was not one to do anything unnecessary.

There were a few people sitting in the corner where he was. They were mostly talking in a low voice, but with Ye Chong's excellent hearing, he could hear exactly what they were saying. Some of the noble ladies had their pet dogs in their laps as they sat around in a circle, chatting about minor affairs.

Suddenly, Ye Chong noticed someone approaching him.

A young man with a glass of red wine in hand approached Ye Chong, seated on his sofa, and greeted him, "Hey, man, are you bored, sitting alone by yourself? Haha, I'm feeling bored too. I don't know why these people all look so excited, don't they get tired too?"

This young man was obviously from one of the noble families. His skin was fair and smooth, and his demeanour was friendly and inviting. He sat down naturally beside Ye Chong and sighed comfortably.

"Hah, I still don't know your name. Mine's Yise," the young man spoke warmly to Ye Chong.

"Ye Chong," Ye Chong replied succinctly.

Suddenly, Yise nodded towards the dance floor and asked, "Say, Brother Ye, what do you think of that lady in the centre of the dance floor?"

Ye Chong followed Yise's direction and saw a beautiful woman dancing joyfully at the centre. The woman had long, flowing hair down her back. She had charming eyes and an innocent smile. A white dress wrapped tightly around her thin waist, and flowed downward and out like a flower. Even Ye Chong, who did not appreciate aesthetics, could see that she stood out from the crowd.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong was not interested in the topic. He

looked away and said, "She looks alright."

"Oh, my goodness! That's Miss Man'er – Su City's number one beauty, Shu Man'er. She's the goddess to many of our young elite men! If you're not interested in her, could it be ..." Yise gave Ye Chong an odd look.

Shu Man'er. The name reminded Ye Chong of Shu Mo'er. Perhaps they were related. Ye Chong turned back to look at her, but could not quite decide on the matter.

"Haha, brother, now you see her! You said she's just alright, but look at you now! Hehe, your eyes betrayed your thoughts. I know that look in you. Of all the people in Su City, 80 percent of them will look like that when they saw Shu Man'er. Of the other 20 percent, 10 are women," Yise said, pleased with himself.

"What of the last 10?" Ye Chong got interested at that.

"They're blind," Yise declared.

Ye Chong suddenly had an idea, and began to study Yise. He was surprised to find man's build suitable for combat. His figure was well balanced; his bones were strong and thick; his movements were coordinated. However, one look at his smooth skin and Ye Chong could tell that the young man had never suffered in any way.

"What're you looking at me like that for? Let me tell you, I'm not interested in men," Yise said with an odd tone.

Ye Chong turned away.

Suddenly, the dance floor erupted into chaos. Ye Chong heard a barking sound coming from there. Everyone in the ballroom turned to look.

When the barking sounds began, Yise looked shocked, "D*mmit! Which b*stard brought a snowhound in here? This is going to be very dangerous!"

"Snowhound? What's that?" Ye Chong asked.

Yise replied anxiously, "It's not a thing, but a species of wild animal. They're small, like a dog, all furry and adorable. But if it suddenly goes mad, things go south very fast. The animals are quick and aggressive. Someone probably thought it's just a cute pet."

"I see."

"We're in trouble now. They don't allow weapons in here. All the guards are outside," Yise looked panicked.

Suddenly, the barking sound got slower and slower to Ye Chong. Yise paled. He saw the mad snowhound now, and it was heading straight towards them.

Ye Chong saw the animal too. It was no larger than the small pet dogs that the noble ladies had on their laps. Its body was covered with thick fur, which made it look a snowball, but its eyes were now red. The adorable little mouth was now salivating menacingly.

Ye Chong's eyes turned cold. He had his fair share of dealing with wild animals, and this one was definitely classified as a threat.

The four limbs hidden underneath the animal's thick fur were powerful. The snowhound moved too quickly to be captured. It had already bit into the throats of three servants now.

"No no no –" Yise was trembling all over.

Ye Chong picked up a butter knife from the table. As Yise watched with hopeless eyes, the butter knife slipped through his fingers and shot out.

Swish! Crack! Both sounds were heard almost simultaneously.

The snowhound was pinned down on the floor by the butter knife. The knife had entered at its throat. Blood spluttered out along the knife. The glow in the animal's red eyes gradually faded.

Its four limbs struggled in vain as it gurgled through the blood in its throat.

Everyone was shocked by this sudden turn of events. Many of them looked at the now innocent and adorable snowhound with pity. Some of the noble ladies even tossed a look of hatred towards Ye Chong. No one bothered with the three dead servants, who were now being removed quietly by the other servants from the ballroom.

"Thank goodness you struck out so quickly! Brother, you saved my life! By the way, that attack was way too cool, can you teach me?" Having survived the danger, Yise was now getting excited.

"Snowy!" A lady's voice cried out with grief.

The young lady approached the snowhound, stuck to the floor. Tears sprang out from her eyes. She crouched on the floor, caressing the now lifeless snowhound and began to sob.

Ye Chong recognized her as Shu Man'er, the lady who was at the centre of the dance floor.

A few energetic young men soon appeared beside Shu Man'er. They were enraged what caused Shu Man'er to cry so pitifully.

"Which m*therf*cker did this? Come the f*ck out!" the young man yelled to the crowd.

"Han, how many times have I told you, we nobles should curse! I'll forgive you this time though. Humph, some fool is feeling very daring tonight," a young man with pointy eyes said in an androgynous voice.

Both of them flanked a handsome young man whose charisma shined like the sun. This young man had a solid, angular face, like it was carved out of marble. He had an air of authority about him. The young man looked around at the crowd. As the other people quickly lowered their gaze, the young man finally found his eyes on Ye Chong.

Of all the people around him, Ye Chong was the only who held his gaze.

"Did you do it?" the young man asked slowly but confidently.

Ye Chong nodded, "Yes."

Standing beside Ye Chong, Yise panicked and whispered to Ye Chong, "That's the son of the 2nd Legion's Legate. His name's George. A young man, but already a Level 6 shooter. He's always been interested in Miss Shu Man'er, and the most likely candidate to become Shu Man'er husband. However, according to my sources, Miss Shu Man'er did not seem interested in him."

"The dog is Man'er's beloved pet, why did you kill it?" George asked firmly.

"A dog? That's a snowhound!" Yise could not help but spoke up from beside Ye Chong.

George flashed him a sharp look, and Yise quickly shut up.

"As long as you apologize to Miss Man'er, I'll let the matter go. What do you say?" George looked at Ye Chong.

Yise did not expect the situation to be so easily resolved. He was overjoyed and was about to agree with the young man when Ye Chong gave a reply that made his heart sank.

"No," Ye Chong replied firmly.

George and his two companions looked surprised. The two friends of his were about to throw insults when George lifted his hand to silence them. He asked lowly, "Will you not give face?"

Ye Chong looked at George with cold eyes. He could not understand why the man's logic was so bad. He had only acted as protector, so why should he apologize to the lady?

Just then, Shu Man'er, who had been sobbing all the while, stood up abruptly with tears all over her face and approached Ye Chong. She bowed down gracefully and said, "Sir, I'm sorry. I didn't know

that Snowy was a snowhound. I'm really sorry for terrifying you."

Shu Man'er apology was like a slap to George's face. George's expression looked terrible right now. He did not think that Shu Man'er would make it so awkward for him.

His eyes flashed ruthlessly as he said, "So it's just me who wants this after all, I understand! However, I cannot let things stand as they are. I request for a duel with this man!"

The crowd burst into an uproar upon his announcement.

"George, are you crazy? This is between you and me, don't get anyone else involved. This is not his fault. I didn't know that Snowy was a snowhound, and that led to this terrible mistake. I'm the one to blame!" Shu Man'er said in a panic, and shot an apologetic look at Ye Chong.

Ye Chong thought it strange. Why would his opponent waste time with words? He should have just acted, like he was about to do now.

Ye Chong closed the gap between him and George so quickly that the crowd only saw him when he appeared before the other man.

Georged looked startled and was about to react when he felt a tight grip on his throat. His feet left the ground.

Ye Chong held onto George's throat and lifted him up easily.

The entire ballroom went silent immediately. Everyone looked at Ye Chong with horror. George was the son of the 2nd Legion's Legate! Was he suicidal? As for the combat experts amongst them, they were shocked because Ye Chong had moved so quickly!

Was this the limit of human speed?

At the moment, the entire ballroom was dead silent.

Splash! Crash! The guests dropped their glasses. The crowd panicked again, knocking down tables and chairs and cutlery and even other people.

"Let him go! Don't hurt the man!"

"Do you want to die? How dare you do something like this?"

"Young man, think carefully about this. Don't do anything stupid. You have to think about the consequences, think about your family ..."

...

"What's going on?" Prince Desnio's low voice managed to silence the crowd once again.

The guests saw the man standing behind the Prince and were all startled. They quickly bowed and greeted, "Your Majesty!" When did the King arrive? Some of them immediately thought of the young man who started this whole incident.

Suddenly, everyone was down on their knees, leaving only Ye Chong holding onto George's throat.

"What happened? Isn't that Aliz's son?" Sun Sieha saw Ye Chong lifting George off the ground and asked incredulously.

"He asked for a duel," Ye Chong briefly explained the situation.

George, that idiot! Sun Sieha cursed the troublesome man inside. Had it been anyone else, he would have just let the matter slide, but this was the son of the 2nd Legion's Legate.

"He's no match for you," Sun Sieha said with a smile, "Just let him go. Don't mind his antics."

The guests were surprised by their King's words. They all knew that His Majesty was a Level 8 shooter. If even His Majesty thought that George was no match against the young man, then the latter must be very strong indeed! On the other hand, the King had sided with the young man immediately without asking for details of the incident. This implied that the young man was greatly favoured. Who in the world was this young man?

"Switch," Ye Chong said, and held out five fingers. Ye Chong was

not impressed with Sun Sieha. He had attended this evening ball without understanding why, and now he had to deal with this nonsense.

Sun Sieha could see that Ye Chong was not happy. He looked at the five outstretched fingers and felt helpless and pained, but still he nodded, "Alright." Inside, he cursed Aliz again for having that useless son. He will get the money from Aliz to settle this.

None of the guests understood the exchange between Ye Chong and Sun Sieha. Only Duke Warren had a glimpse of the story behind it. He lowered his head and felt deeply unsettled.

Chapter 541: Place Your Bets!

Ye Chong took a look at Sun Sieha, saw him nod, and released the man in his grasp. Once George was released, he immediately fell kneeling to the ground, coughing violently with his hands to his throat. As Ye Chong had suffocated him for too long, his face looked purplish due to the lack of oxygen.

He threw a hateful look at Ye Chong for having embarrassing him so greatly in front of all the other nobles.

Ming Xiao saw the look George gave Ye Chong, and frowned. He thought to himself, "What a foolish boy! Can he not see where the wind is blowing? This is not a man he can afford to be enemies with!" Ming Xiao and Aliz were close, so Ming Xiao decided to warn his friend about his son, and hope that George would not cause further incidents.

Some of the important figures in the government were disappointed as they watched the handsome young man react inappropriately. George had seemed to be a smart man, but in the end he proved that his was little more than his looks.

As George coughed violently against the silent background, all the other guests looked at Ye Chong in surprise. The noble ladies who had stared at him with hatred now squirmed in their own corners, looking very afraid. The others who had tried to advise him or scold him were now terribly regretful of their actions.

"Haha," Sun Sieha laughed, but the coldness behind his voice reminded all the guests of the rumours of their King's severity and willingness to kill. All the guests turned fearful, including Ming Xiao, Prince Desnio and Duke Warren.

Ye Chong stood where he was with an air of nonchalance. He was more wary than afraid of Sun Sieha. He understood that his relationship with Sun Sieha was one of equals. While he may seem to be under many restrictions imposed by Sun Sieha, the truth was

in fact the opposite. Ye Chong did not need Sun Sieha, but Sun Sieha needed Ye Chong. From this perspective, Sun Sieha was the one who was more restricted, instead of Ye Chong.

Besides, with the recent breakthrough, Ye Chong was now feeling at his best. He had nothing to be afraid of. This did not mean that he would act carelessly, however. Staying calm was second nature to him, even now.

For example, he was now trying to figure out the reason for Sun Sieha's invitation to this evening ball, and would even visit his manor just to do that.

Sun Sieha must have some good reason for this.

The truth was, Ye Chong had no experience in politics. He could only figure things out through careful thinking. He could not be confident of the results of his deductions, but he was sure that he would one day understand what it was all about. When that day came, he would be able to conduct himself more appropriately. He would become better, and stronger! Growth was achieved through accumulation of knowledge and skills over time.

Never stop thinking, never stop trying – that was Ye Chong's belief.

"I've only been King for a while, and seldom had time to see you all. It's nice to see all of you having a good time," Sun Sieha said, but his plain words were full of authority. No one dared to raise their heads. Of course, the notable exception was Ye Chong.

"Haha, enjoy yourselves to your heart's content, no need to be nervous. Well, as long as your work is finished, the occasional indulgence in leisure is not a bad pastime. However ..." Sun Sieha raised his voice at the end, building suspense in his audience. Some of the guests shuddered.

Sun Sieha looked around him, satisfied with the response that he invoked, and continued slowly, "As long as you have completed

your duties, it is fine. If anyone were to overindulge and neglect their duties ... Haha, well, I suppose I need not elaborate," Sun Sieha said with a pleasant face, but the guests were all terrified.

"Oh, by the way, let me introduce to you," Sun Sieha motioned to Ye Chong, "This is Master Ye Chong, Eastern Cloud's most remarkable weaponsmith. With Master Karu's recommendation and my approval, the man will be appointed as our country's Chief Weaponsmith."

The nobles know now who the young man really was! Some of them thought of how Master Karu, their former Chief Weaponsmith, was willing to pass on his title to this young man. It meant that Master Karu approved of the young man's capabilities.

There were also nobles from other countries amongst the guests. They immediately felt wary – did this mean that Eastern Cloud was having a huge cabinet changeover?

"You may not know this, but Master Ye Chong is also a close range combat expert. I believe you've seen his demonstration," Sun Sieha said with a smile, "In fact, before I met Master Ye Chong, I never thought that anyone could possibly pose a threat to shooters. However, not too long ago, I saw someone who could. This was when I first saw Master Ye Chong. He was fighting against 12 Level 6 shooters! The shooters suffered seven casualties!" Sun Sieha dropped the bomb in the evening ball. The guests huddled together in quiet discussion, giving Ye Chong looks of fear and wariness. George, who had just straightened himself, looked terrible. He now knew how strong his opponent was.

Only someone as strong as a Level 8 shooter could hope to fight against a dozen Level 6 shooters all at once. Even a Level 7 shooter could barely manage it. Moreover, this young man had injured or killed seven of the 12. That itself was shocking. Could this young man actually be as strong as a Level 8 shooter?

The taciturn young man suddenly became an enigma to his

bewildered audience. He was like a huge beast that came out of the wild, staring down at his prey.

Sun Sieha was happy with the guests' reaction of curiosity mixed with fear. He wanted this to happen. As a member of the Royal family, he knew the power of the nobility. He also knew that tonight's evening ball would cause a huge uproar amongst the nobles.

"Your Majesty, I don't believe it!" Someone uttered suddenly. This bold and loud voice drew stares from the other guests. The ones who knew the voice chuckled quietly to themselves. They were in for a good show.

The man who spoke was more than six feet tall. He had broad shoulders, muscular arms and large hands. His square face had a pair of bushy eyebrows, under which two eyes shone brightly.

"You don't believe it? Do you question my words?" Sun Sieha's face immediately turned dark. His gaze sharpened with threat.

"Mang, you idiot, how dare you? Apologize to His Majesty!" Ming Xiao, who had remained passive throughout, finally spoke up. Mang was one of his soldiers. At a tender age of 18, he was physically impressive and had above average skills in parapsychic control. He was already a Level 6 shooter. Ming Xiao liked his straightforward nature, and frequently had him by his side. However, the man was poised to cause trouble tonight.

Sun Sieha waved at Ming Xiao to silence him. His eyes locked onto Mang sharply. The atmosphere in the function room tensed up. All the guests held their breath. The new King was known to be unmerciful. Who would dare to disagree with the King openly? Many of them were worried about Mang. It would not surprise them if the King ordered for the man to be executed right then.

The young King was long known for his violent tendencies. When he was Crown Prince, the previous King had ordered his son to first serve as Brigade Commander as part of his training. Once,

when his subordinates were late for a meeting, the then Crown Prince had killed 18 soldiers with his own hands. From then onwards, everyone knew that Sun Sieha was not to be messed with. As His Majesty roamed the land in search for talents, his ruthless nature showed. Many shooters died in his hands. The King did not have a good reputation amongst the independent shooters out there.

However, no one doubted the power of the Royal Family. The military force was under his command, while the government officials had expressed their loyalty to him. Besides, with Prince Desnio's full support and his own ability as a Level 8 shooter, the present King had even more supporters than his father before him. With a competent and fair ruler, everyone knew that Eastern Cloud was about to rise above her rivals.

Their King had absolute power in Eastern Cloud!

If anyone dared to speak against His Majesty, it would be an act of suicide!

Time seemed to slow down in the evening ball. The guests sweated nervously. Mang seemed to realize that he had made a mistake, but still he straightened himself despite his flushed cheeks and kept his mouth shut.

"You don't believe me?" Suddenly, the King softened, as though he was only asking something inconsequential.

Mang was taken by surprise, but he replied on instinct, "I – Of course I don't! Only a Level 8 shooter can hold himself against a dozen Level 6 shooters. This young man is strong, but how can he be more powerful than a Level 8 shooter?" The guests agreed quietly with Mang. They had the same suspicion, but not the imprudence to simply voice it out.

The King continued, "How can I make you believe me?"

"Unless – Unless ..." Mang was stuck with the question. He

panicked, but quickly figured out something, "Unless he can defeat a dozen Level 6 shooters again, right before our eyes!"

When the guests heard Mang's suggestion, they all shook their heads inside. Things were not quite so simple. Every battle was different, and there were many reasons for the outcome to go one way or the other. In a different location, against the same number of opponents, the result would surely be different.

Sun Sieha smiled coldly and said, "That's a bit unreasonable, don't you think?"

Mang blushed even deeper. He also realized the holes in his reasoning.

"However," Sun Sieha continued with a cold smile, "I think it's a wonderful idea." He suddenly turned to Ye Chong and asked, "Ye Chong, what do you think?"

Ye Chong finally realized why Sun Sieha wanted him at the evening ball. Since it was part of the agreement they had last time, Ye Chong had no reason to reject the idea. He nodded and said, "Sure!"

Was this guy crazy?

The nobles looked at Ye Chong with disbelief. They never imagined that Ye Chong would agree to such an unreasonable request!

Sun Sieha looked at the nobles and smiled, "I've heard that there are many Level 6 shooters amongst you. Choose any 12 of them. Let us witness a demonstration of this lesser known form of combat. However, it's a little dull to simply enjoy the battle. We should have a betting pool, with no limits on the betting amount. Hmm, let's have the Prince be the organizer."

The sensible Prince Desnio stood forward and bowed to his guests, "Since His Majesty requested it, well, let me organize this round of betting. Don't worry, we have top notch facilities for

combat, and a great variety of weapons to choose from. There will also be pre-match massage services and snacks for everyone. Of course, special services will also be seen to, if you're interested."

The guests chuckled at Prince Desnio's introduction. Even Sun Sieha smiled.

Soon, 12 Level 6 shooters were named. They include experienced combatants from the military, like Mang, but most of them were young nobles. George was one of the better known young nobles, and his prowess as a shooter was also widely recognized. The most surprising candidate was Shu Man'er. No one expected the seemingly fragile young woman to be a Level 6 shooter.

The experienced shooters threw careful looks at Ye Chong. They saw how quick the young man was earlier. Nevertheless, they were confident of themselves. An experienced Level 6 shooter was much stronger than their less experienced counterpart. The veterans felt that Ye Chong could only stand a chance against a dozen newly promoted Level 6 shooters.

As the young nobles, they were all eager to jump straight into battle. They did not believe that Ye Chong could defeat 12 Level 6 shooters all by himself. Some of the noble families chose their strongest disciples to represent them, hoping to draw favourable attention from the King.

Sun Sieha smiled almost imperceptibly, seeing how eager the nobles were. He started by saying, "Well, since we're betting and I actually suggested it, I'll place my bet on Ye Chong. How much should it be? Let's go with a 10 million."

Duke Warren was keeping a close watch on the King's behaviour. He caught the smile on the King's face, and looked at the hesitant nobles in the function room. Duke Warren had an inkling of what to do next. He smiled and said, "Since we're betting, I will make my bet too. I bet 10 million that the 12 shooters will win." He then stood to the side quietly. He was happy to see a quick glance from

the King towards him, but kept it to himself.

Ming Xiao stroked his chin and grinned, "Your Majesty, I'll place my bet as well. 10 million against Master Ye Chong. I believe that Master Ye Chong is capable, but a dozen Level 6 shooters is still quite a challenge." The Legate's eyes gleamed with mischief.

"Place your bets now! You can only place one bet. No changes in the betting amount!" Prince Desnio announced loudly to his guests.

With Duke Warren and Ming Xiao taking lead, the rest of the nobles no longer hesitated. They did not bet a lot, but all of them wanted the chance to win a bet against their King. It did not matter how much they win in the end. After all, how many people can boast about winning a bet against His Majesty?

Ye Chong suddenly spoke up from beside Sun Sieha, "50 million on myself." Sun Sieha's smile froze awkwardly. Ye Chong placed a bet of 50 million, but he only betted 10 million. Even if he won, he could only get a sixth of the betting pool. He was about to raise his bet, then remembered that Prince Desnio said the amount cannot be changed. The King felt the loss acutely.

Just then, George spoke up as well, "I bet 50 million! The shooters will win!" George threw a vengeful glare at Ye Chong. Ming Xiao frowned again, thinking about how insensible the young man was.

As expected, Ming Xiao saw His Majesty's eyes narrowed a little. This was bad. The boy was about to cause trouble. When the match was over, he will send people to drag the young man back to Aliz.

The rest of the nobles were excited by the bets from Ye Chong and George. Shu Man'er spoke up with her clear voice, "I bet 20 million."

"10 million from me!"

"10 million!"

...

The nobles who had someone representing them in the shooters team placed the most bets to show their support. Each of them contributed no less than 10 million in the betting pool. 10 million was a negligible sum to them. It would not do well for their reputation to bet too little, but betting too much would be an offence to the King. They were not as foolish as George.

In the end, the total amount in the betting pool surprised even Prince Desnio. "Well well, this is great. Let me announce the betting amount in the pool. We have 60 million betting for Master Ye Chong. As for the 12 shooters," he looked around at his guests and continued, "they have 160 million going for them. Haha, it's a spectacular betting pool."

Sun Sieha calculated his winnings and threw a bitter glance at Ye Chong. All that easy money was snatched away from him, but there was nothing he could do about it. He felt miserable just thinking about it.

Chapter 542: Battleground

Prince Desnio's mansion was located in the metropolis of Su City, where every inch of land was priceless. Even with his wealth and power, it was impossible to have a battleground here in the capital. The Prince had a battleground about 30 kilometers from the capital, however. The distance was not an issue for the excited nobles.

As the guests all head towards the battleground, Ye Chong naturally went in the King's vehicle, accompanied also by three important figures of the government. This honour given to him was a chilling statement to the other nobles.

"I regret to inform that the battleground was only last used when His Majesty was young and staying with me. It had been neglected since. However, not to worry, everyone, the facilities in this place are definitely the best available in Eastern Cloud. Of course, the available terrain options are not as advanced as in professional battle rings. Your understanding is much appreciated," Prince Desnio introduced his place, relaxed in his role.

It was a huge battleground, with an area of about five or size square kilometres. Desnio and his guests were now entering the audience chamber. Here was a huge screen that showed the actual battleground. If Ye Chong were here, he would have been greatly surprised. The feed lacked the resolution offered by 3D holographic imaging, but it was still impressive. The audience chamber was luxuriously decorated. There were plush sofas for everyone, and the servants had already prepared finger food and drinks for the guests. The live feed on the screen was only 2D, but it was still very clear. Besides, they had used more cameras to provide the audience with more viewing angles of the match.

The nobles took their places, leaving the front seat for His Majesty. The King was present at this duel hosted by Prince Desnio, accompanied by both Duke Warren and Sir Ming Xiao. The

nobles quickly realized that this was probably the grandest match ever organized in the history of Eastern Cloud. Many of them looked very excited, for they had chanced to be present in this occasion too by pure good luck.

As the host of this match, Prince Desnio stepped up to the speaking podium. He sat down and drank some water, preparing himself.

"The battleground is now set for Option One of the available terrains, in what we know as the Hills. I believe that you're all very familiar with this one. However, ours is not the standard Option One, but a slightly modified version of it. Ah, I believe you know why. This is a terrain that many people are familiar with. To ramp up the suspense, we have made some alterations to the terrain. If anyone thought that being familiar with the terrain would serve as an advantage, they would be seriously mistaken."

Sun Sieha studied the familiar battleground on the screen, his expression softening as he felt nostalgia creeping into him. He had loved to play here when he was younger. As he grew older, it became an important place for him to train himself in combat. This was a place full of memories.

Prince Desnio continued chattily, "This is a medium sized battleground that can accommodate up to 40 shooters. Since the lands are hilly, it serves as a test for not only a shooter's aiming and parapsychic skills, but also their ability to assess their environment and strategize accordingly.

"Hah, I believe you can't wait for it to begin now!

"I'll be brief. To make things interesting, Master Ye Chong and the 12 shooters will draw lots and enter the terrain from two different entrances. This means that they won't know where the other side is. Each side must try to locate and defeat the other in this complicated terrain.

"The 12 shooters are all armed with professional V shaped

fluorescent guns used for matches. The shots will leave a fluorescent mark on the target, which will only fade away after three days. To date, no one has been able to remove this fluorescence, so there will be no issues on fairness. Alright, our mod team has already made some minor modifications to the guns of the 12 shooters. The shooters have checked their weapons, and there are no issues to report.

"A gun is like an extended limb of a shooter. Hence, every shooter must be very familiar with their weapon, as every qualified shooter would be. Old Ming once told me that his soldiers must all be very familiar with their guns, even if it means being less familiar with their wives. But if you want to do that, hehe, you have to sleep with your gun instead of your wife for three years. All of you here who work under Old Ming, better watch it, don't just huddle close with your wife and forget about your gun, or else, hehe ..."

A few snickers came from the guests. Ming Xiao was Legate of the 1st Legion in name, but as the second most important figure in the government next to the King, he also had many nobles backing him. Ming Xiao was not offended, but grinned widely at the tease. Beside him, Duke Warren only humped coldly, unimpressed with the joke.

Sun Sieha looked at the two rivals and smiled without comment.

"Alright, back to the match. Well, our Master Ye is a man of character. Hmm, of strong character, I suppose! I don't know about his weapon building skills, but seeing Master Ye's moves earlier, I think no one doubts his combat abilities. Master Ye Chong was able to throw a butter knife made of silvercore wood and pin the fast moving snowhound on the ground. My servant reported to me nervously that the butter knife had embedded itself five centimeters into the ground after it went through the snowhound. You can imagine how much strength it takes to do that. An accurate and powerful shot. We look forward to Master Ye's performance."

Prince Desnio looked up at his guests and continued slowly but confidently, "Master Ye Chong has demonstrated to us another form of combat – close range combat. There are no parapsychic waves, no guns involved. Master Ye Chong has overhauled everything we've come to understand about battle. If Master Ye Chong can win against these 12 Level 6 shooters, then ..." Prince Desnio paused and looked around at his guests solemnly, "A new form of combat will be presented to us. It does not rely on parapsychic sense or guns, but only on physical strength and techniques. This is what I think I believe Master Ye can break the dominance that shooters have in our world."

The people listening from below, especially the military men like Ming Xiao, began to feel the gravity of the situation. Their expression turned serious. Despite the incredulity of it, what would happen if Ye Chong really won this match?

Anyone who could win against a dozen Level 6 shooters would be strong enough to be called a master in his trade. Even in Eastern Cloud, such a person was not easy to find.

They must consider the possibility of Ye Chong's form of combat and its implications in their line of expertise.

"Fortunately, we will witness this importance match live on screen. Moreover, Master Ye is of Eastern Cloud, and our Chief Weaponsmith. No matter what happens due to Master Ye's demonstration in combat, we, Eastern Cloud country, will be the first to realize it, and the first to respond to it. Once we succeed, we will be leading the world into this new age!"

Prince Desnio's speech had invigorating. Moreover, it managed to intrigue even the nobles who were not interested in shooters or the like. Even Sun Sieha's eyes were gleaming with anticipation. Making Eastern Cloud stronger was an ambition that he thought about day and night.

"Master Ye does not have any weapons with him. I'm curious,

how will he fight against the shooters? However, Master Ye does not look nervous at all. He'd not worried about himself, but we'll see about that. I think that this is going to be a very memorable battle.

"Both sides are now making their final preparations. In the meantime, let me talk more about this terrain. As I mentioned earlier, the battleground is based on our standard Option One, the Hills, but with slight modifications. Option One is a hilly terrain, known for its complicated landscape. Mine, in particular, has mountains built with actual mountain rocks, making the area even harder to navigate. The terrain is extremely complicated. Parapsychic waves will be affected greatly, since the feedback will be less accurate than usual. Only an experienced shooter can decipher useful information from inaccurate parapsychic feedback. Besides, a shooter needs to be physically fit enough to navigate the terrain, since there is a lot of climbing involved.

"Alright, that's all for introduction of the terrain. Our combatants have all entered the battleground."

Everyone, including Sun Sieha, shifted their gaze towards the huge screen.

"Aha, Master Ye and the other 12 shooters are entering from entrances that are directly opposite to each other. This means that they will need some time to locate the other side. For now, let's relax and take a drink," Prince Desnio narrated lightly, but no one looked away from the screen.

"Let's start with our 12 young shooters. Hmm, not bad, they're maintaining a neat formation. In fact, the best place to be right now is somewhere high enough for vantage point, where their parapsychic waves will not be too severely affected. However, in this terrain, climbing is going to be difficult no matter where you are. Ah, Mang looked like he's trying to climb, but he's given up quickly. Without the right tools, it's hard to scale up the mountains here.

"Our beautiful Miss Man'er looks fantastic in her combat uniform. I think many of our young men here must feel even more drawn to her now. Despite her meek outlook, Ms Man'er is actually a Level 6 shooter. Truly a surprise to us. But from the way she conducted herself steadily in the battleground, I think we're all convinced that she's the real deal."

Prince Desnio knew the taste of his audience. The camera panned and zoomed towards Shu Man'er. The guests responded immediately with some whistles from the younger crowd.

Sun Sieha looked at Shu Man'er on the screen and suddenly thought of something. A cold look flashed in his eyes. He signalled for one of the nearby servants to approach him and whispered some orders to the servant. The servant bowed and listened, then rushed out to see to the task he was entrusted with. No one but Duke Warren and Ming Xiao, who were sitting beside the King, noticed this little exchange.

On stage, Prince Desnio was continuing, "Personally, I think that this battle will end up with both sides meeting each other without expecting it."

"Alright, let's move on to our Master Ye, the man of surprises. What kind of surprise are we in for now?"

The screen shifted towards Ye Chong.

"Master Ye is not in a hurry. He seems to be used to this kind of environment. Oh, just to keep everyone from second guessing, let me make some clarifications here," Prince Desnio affected an air of seriousness, "this is the first time I've seen Master Ye. The man has never been to my battleground before."

Some of the noble ladies hid their smiles at the Prince's act.

The night was turning out to be quite enjoyable. The women settled comfortably in a warm room, sitting on plush sofa cushions with their pet dogs on their laps as they listened to the Prince's

narration. It was a cosy experience. The younger noble ladies could not help looking at the young King, sitting at the front, as they tried to devise ways to get closer to him.

"Master Ye seems to be quite relaxed, or at least he looks relaxed. Oh, looks like Master Ye is thinking of going to a higher point. The hills are quite difficult to climb. Hmm, Master Ye did not bring any tools with him. In fact, Master Ye continues to surprise me. I have no idea what he's about to do next. Let us wait and see."

Suddenly, the Prince gasped audibly in the audience chamber. The audience cried out in surprise at nearly the same time. "Ah! Master Ye has begun climbing! Heaven, he's fast, very fast! He's just like a monkey, no, he's even better than a monkey. Without any tools, the man is scaling up the nearly vertical cliff. It's incredible! It's just incredible!"

The audience could not help but stood up to watch Ye Chong on the screen. He had truly shocked them all. Ye Chong was climbing a rocky hill that was over 30 meters high, with an almost vertical ascent. Despite this, Ye Chong was scaling up the hill with apparent ease.

To the audience, this was an impossible feat. They would not have believed it possible without seeing it for themselves. Since Ye Chong was moving too quickly, they could not see how Ye Chong could scale up the cliff without the aid of any tools.

"Ohh!" Prince Desnio was wild with excitement. With his huge build, he looked like a huge chimpanzee in frenzy, "This is amazing! Master Ye has brought to us a surprise like no other. Heavens, this is not humanly possible. Even with the right tools, I'm sure that no one can climb the hill so quickly. Now that he's reached the peak, Master Ye has an advantage in the match. If he was a shooter and with a laser gun in hand, I'm sure that we can already announce him as the winner."

"However, the crux of the matter is, our Master Ye is not, in fact,

a shooter, and he has no weapons with him. Right now, I'm thinking about our shooters, who always thought that physical fitness is not important. If they were to watch this match, I'm sure that they will realize their mistake. If a shooter is physically strong, well, not to the point of Master Ye here, but if the shooter can at least climb up to a high enough vantage point, then the advantage gained from it, hmm, need I say more?"

The audience considered Prince Desnio's words, especially military personnel like Ming Xiao. This frequently ignored problem was now brought to surface. It was because they were witnessing Ye Chong's extreme way of combat that they were able to reflect on their thought bias with seriousness.

A thin smile appeared on Sun Sieha's face. No matter the outcome of the actual match, he had won where it mattered. Perhaps the match was enough to convince people that it was wrong for shooters to neglect physical strength in favour of parapsychic control, but he could already see their conviction wavering.

Just then, the servant who left earlier returned to the audience chamber. He presented himself before the King and whispered something by his ear. He spoke quietly enough that even Duke Warren and Ming Xiao, who were sitting beside the King, could not hear him. Even so, both men sat facing the screen, pretending to be absorbed in the match.

After the servant was finished, Sun Sieha's smile turned a touch colder. He waved away the servant and directed his attention back to the huge screen. Now, both Duke Warren and Ming Xiao noticed the ghastly look that flashed in the King's eyes. They were both chilled by what they saw, but pretended to see nothing at all.

Chapter 543: Strength and Wickedness

Ye Chong did not have to think much about the match. The terrain that Prince Desnio described as complicated was not a hindrance to him. Back on the trash planet, he had travel in much worse places every single day.

He soon located the 12 shooters. He headed towards them without delay. Ye Chong moved easily across the hilly terrain. His seemingly fragile body was packed with explosive strength. His legs were like springs, launching him higher and further than any normal human being!

"Heavens! What's that I saw? What was that?" Prince Desnio stood up in excitement and exclaimed, "Is that running? Or is that flying? I can't imagine anyone able to jump around like that so freely. He's so fast it's like a lightning bolt. This goes against all laws of gravity. Has Master Ye trained his legs to possess this much power? It's incredible! Oh, I'd like to have Master Ye as my teacher, so that I would one day be able to run like that too. I'll walk the borders of Eastern Cloud with my own legs!"

All the nobles were just as excited as Prince Desnio. They stared at the screen with bulging eyes. Many of the younger nobilities even considered asking Ye Chong to be their teacher. Ye Chong's amazing abilities had left them thoroughly impressed.

Prince Desnio was excited, but he still had a shred of calmness left in him. "Master Ye's performance is beyond our imaginations, but it is still too early to decide who will win tonight's match. After all, our shooters are equally capable. Their parapsychic senses are almost at the speed of light. Who will emerge as the champion tonight? Master Ye, or the shooters? No matter the outcome, we can be sure that both sides will clash into each other magnificently."

Ye Chong's face was as expressionless as usual. He ran towards

the 12 shooters. His movements reminded the audience of a leopard running through the woods - fluid and powerful.

In fact, this was easier than facing against the 12 shooters last time. Before this, it was an open plane in his courtyard whereas this time it was a hilly environment that heavily favoured Ye Chong. Even without his recent breakthrough, Ye Chong was sure he could deal with three shooters at a time with no issue, much less in his current improved state.

After the isolated training was over, Ye Chong had rested for a few days. Now, when he ran, he could feel so much energy flowing through his body. He ran faster and faster, hearing the wind bellowing loudly in his ears. As Ye Chong accelerated, his body moved like a spirit on the huge screen, leaving a long afterimage behind his fleeting figure.

The audience members were all on their feet by now. They had never seen anything quite like this! Of all the people in the audience chamber, only Sun Sieha was sitting calmly, enjoying his red wine. On one side, Duke Warren was standing up, gaping at the screen. On his other side, Ming Xiao was not faring any better. He had crushed the wine glass in his hand into pieces, splashing red wine all over his attire. The man was oblivious to it all, however, as he continued to stare at the blurry figure on the huge screen.

The distance felt a little short for Ye Chong.

The 12 shooters were already in sight as Ye Chong slid down from above a hill. He did not slow down as he slipped past the hilly terrain that stood in his way. He slithered forward like a black bolt of lightning. It must be terrible to run into any obstacles at his speed, but Ye Chong did not seem to care. Besides, he was without a scratch so far! He controlled his trajectory easily, avoiding all the sharp protrusions along his way.

As he approached the shooters, Ye Chong moved even more carefully. The shooters were no threat to him, but he would take

no chances.

He began to vibrate all his body parts at high frequency. His strong body was the only reason he could execute such an impossible feat.

His figure now appeared like an unrecognizable blob on the huge screen. No one knew what was happening, except for Sun Sieha. It was enough to command an even greater sense of mystery in Ye Chong for all the nobles who thought themselves well learned.

Ye Chong stepped lightly, approaching the shooters with a Z shaped manoeuvre. The complicated terrain made it an excellent battlefield for Ye Chong. He could easily find anchor points to make his next leap.

Ye Chong's first contact was with George. Perhaps the man was still feeling vengeful, but he was leading the shooters team right then. He had the most excruciating experience today. "Excruciating" was no exaggeration. The man did not seem to realize that his enemy was just close by yet. He was still searching carefully with parapsychic sense.

George was one of the best shooters in his generation. A duel was a common way for nobles to resolve conflicts, especially for the young. Naturally, for people of higher status like Duke Warren and Ming Xiao, the extent of the duel escalated to an entirely different level.

George was familiar with the Hills. He was deeply humiliated earlier tonight. Never had he been humiliated in front of so many people before. Most importantly, he would leave a bad impression in the King.

It was simply terrible!

The thought of that twice cursed b*stard made George grind his teeth in anger.

Humiliation – it was a monumental humiliation! He must avenge

for it with his own hands!

He was completely defenceless just now, but he thought that was because his opponent had ambushed him. That was against the rules of combat, lacking the grace that nobles should have. The d*mned bumpkin! George could not stop cursing Ye Chong.

He also did not forget Shu Man'er. His glance turned towards Shu Man'er, who was not far from her. The woman had dared to leave him in such disgrace. He will see to it that the Shu Family paid the price. He never thought much of the Shu Family.

Suddenly, he saw a blur in his vision.

"What was that?" He blacked out before he could even react.

Ye Chong struck out fast, landing a chop on George's jugular vein and rendering the man unconscious.

It all happened so quickly, but the veterans like Mang responded just as quickly. Mang called out, "Everyone, look out!" Now was the time when the difference between the experienced shooters like Mang and the nobles showed. The nobles all reacted clumsily, unsure of what to do next. The veterans had already begun firing on instinct.

They could not lock on to Ye Chong, but they also knew that it would be very difficult to avoid being shot at in this narrow space around them. They fired without thinking about their comrades, knowing that the fluorescent beams were harmless. What they aimed for was the team's win. As long as they could defeat Ye Chong, it did not matter if anyone on their side got shot. Shu Man'er surprised everyone by also having her gun out almost immediately. Her flawless face showed calm and seasoned competence. Nevertheless, she had not fired yet for some reason.

Despite their experience, the shooters were no match for Ye Chong, especially because this was the latter's specialty – close range combat.

Before the shooters responded properly, Ye Chong had lifted George and threw him towards them like a sandbag.

George's body twisted in the air and was shot by hundreds of fluorescent beams. The fluorescent beams were harmless, but it could beams could penetrate clothing and leave a mark on his body that would not disappear for at least three days. In just a few seconds, George's body was already covered with hundreds of fluorescent spots, glowing through his clothes.

The noble ladies hid their smiles behind their hands. Some of the middle aged women looked like they wanted to just pounce on him.

Wham! The sandbag that was George landed on a shooter. By now, poor George had hit a few rocky protrusions, leaving him almost unrecognizable.

On the huge screen, the camera captured clearly the fearful expressions of the shooters. The nobles lost any pretence of calmness by now. What were the shooters up against? Ming Xiao looked positively flustered. Mang was a soldier under him, and he knew that the man would not show such an expression unless something extremely unsettling had happened.

What were they up against?

Mang felt his heart skip a beat. If he was not seeing it for himself, he would have thought the other guy was just a spirit or something. That was the only way to explain why he could not lock on to the guy with his parapsychic sense. Nevertheless, Mang was an experienced combatant. He did not panic. Instead, he suppressed his fear and began to think – the opponent must be doing something to avoid his parapsychic aim, but what could that be?

Ye Chong did not give him the chance to figure it out. He disappeared behind a hill.

His disappearance relieved the tension in the shooters. They exchanged looks of confusion and fear.

Shu Man'er was looking very pale. She had her back against a rocky pillar, which gave her a sense of security.

Suddenly, a hand appeared from behind her. She felt numbness in her neck, and slumped down to the floor. Her laser gun fell onto the ground.

The shooters' parapsychic waves were already spread around them. They still could not sense Ye Chong, but they could easily notice Shu Man'er dropping to the ground. Before they could actually turn towards Shu Man'er, the woman was already sent flying towards them.

Upon seeing Shu Man'er with her eyes tightly shut, two of the nobles exchanged a look – they could not possibly fire at her. Both of them nodded and spread out their arms, hoping to catch her. If she were to hit the rocks just like that, how could the beautiful woman possibly take it? Even if she only got a scratch, it would be a most regrettable injury!

Seeing Shu Man'er looking so pitiful, the only thought that came to them was this – they did not mind losing if they could save Shu Man'er.

Thus, they sacrificed themselves!

Shu Man'er was flying with so much force that it threw them both back against the rocky cliffs. Both men vomited blood and blacked out with Shu Man'er in their arms.

Mang was caught by surprise. It all happened so quickly that he could not stop the two shooters before they went out in such a ridiculous fashion.

"D*mn!" Mang cursed loudly. Their opponent was despicable!

Many of the nobles shared Mang's sentiment. They felt sympathetic, seeing Shu Man'er being tossed towards the two

shooters. Many of the younger men even protested out loud, but were stopped by their seniors.

Sun Sieha smiled reluctantly and set down his glass. "Can't the man win more gracefully?" He thought to himself. With Ye Chong's skills, he hardly needed to resort to these base tricks to win against the young shooters. That would have helped him more with his plans ahead. Now, everyone became more interested in Shu Man'er instead of the important things. Those young men looked angry enough to storm the battleground.

That d*mned Shu Man'er! His plan would have gone perfectly had she not interfered. Sun Sieha's gaze sharpened for a moment. He would allow no one to play tricks with him ...

...

Ye Chong did not know what Sun Sieha was thinking about right then. He was still fighting according to his own weird and unpredictable strategies. He must consider the most efficient, safest and fastest way to end the battle.

...

Ambush! It was an ambush! Ye Chong never showed himself at all. He always attacked from difficult angles, like from behind or above them. Anything around them could become a weapon for him. Even tiny rocks turned wicked and harmful in his hands.

Mang was hit by a tiny rock on the forehead and blacked out straight after.

The most terrifying thing was not the tiny rocks imbued with wicked intentions, but the fear that continued to haunt every one of them. Danger lurked in every dark corner. The enemy was like a spirit that could appear out of nowhere. The fear was paralyzing!

Strength and wickedness – these were the main themes of the glorious match that night.

Chapter 544: His Majesty's Gifts

In the end, it was hard to tell who won the match. Ye Chong's unique way of battle was surprising to everyone, but his ambushing style also left a bad taste in many of the guests. In particular, the way he threw Shu Man'er was received with strong disdain and disapproval by many young shooters.

The only thing that Sun Sieha was grateful for was how the match was poised to become the hottest topic amongst the guests of the evening ball. Based on his experience, word of the battle will reach the entire capital by tomorrow. He did not really care if they liked Ye Chong. He only wanted them to be more interested in close range combat.

The night's event came to end. All the guests looked excited. Some of them could see the larger picture behind this duel, while others only saw it as impressive entertainment.

The guests bid each other farewell courteously and gracefully, and left on their vehicles.

Ye Chong sat beside Sun Sieha. He was happy with today's foray. The boring evening ball turned out to be fruitful after all. That was all that mattered for the pragmatic Ye Chong.

Just when Ye Chong thought Sun Sieha was going to send him back his manor, a servant approached their car and said, "Your Majesty, she's here."

Sun Sieha's eyes turned cold as he nodded to the servant.

After that, a woman was brought to them. Ye Chong saw that it was Shu Man'er.

Shu Man'er was only rendered unconscious during the battle, but did not sustain injuries. She looked a little haggard.

Upon seeing Sun Sieha, Shu Man'er panicked and quickly went down on her knees, "Your Majesty!"

Sun Sieha ignored her. He looked at Ye Chong with a smile and said, "You probably don't know this, but her elder sister is Shu Mo'er, the Level 6 shooter that you fought against last time."

Ye Chong listened without expression.

"The Shu Family, well, it's not especially powerful or something, but it does have these two capable sisters. I've had all the Level 6 shooters who survived last time investigated. That is how I came to know that Shu Mo'er is Shu Man'er elder sister. Who could have known that the famous beauty, Shu Man'er has an equally impressive elder sister? Tsk tsk, if those young nobles found that, the Shu Family will find itself busy with visitors."

Sun Sieha spoke casually, but his eyes were cold and stern.

"I left Shu Mo'er alive because of her teacher, Mei Wu. You see, Mei Wu and I have a shared history. I spare her student out of respect," Sun Sieha had an unreadable expression when he said this, but he quickly gathered himself.

"Humph, but the sisters are wrong to assume that having Mei Wu's support allows them to get away with things," Sun Sieha's voice turned cold as he continued.

Shu Man'er shuddered.

"Look at me," Sun Sieha ordered.

Shu Man'er lifted her head. Her pale face framed a pair of eyes filled with terror

"You have good looks," Sun Sieha complimented with a nod, "and talent. A Level 6 shooter at such a young age. There is potential in you."

Shu Man'er bit her lips and shuddered again.

"It's really a pity!" Sun Sieha shook his head regretfully, "You made a terrible and malicious decision despite being so young." He turned to Ye Chong and continued, "You're not aware of this, but

she exchanged the energy crystal in her laser gun for the duel to a radioactive crystal. Hehe, no one knew about it! Radioactive crystals can fire laser beams with high radioactivity. You won't feel it when you're shot, and it's not noticeable by the audience. However, you're in for a nasty ride later. Your bones will slowly turn to mush. It's like a slow acting poison."

Ye Chong felt chilled by this discovery.

"Shocking, isn't it? I was also surprised when my subordinate reported to me. It's not every day you encounter such a malicious trick. I'm wonder, though, does she always have radioactive crystals on her? But I can't be bothered to investigate further. Keeping and using radioactive crystals without permission is a crime that's enough to make the Shu Family suffer," Sun Sieha said with a smile to Ye Chong.

"Forgive me, Your Majesty, please forgive me!" Shu Man'er sobbed as she pleaded, knocking her forehead on the ground repeatedly.

Sun Sieha ignored her completely and continued slowly, "There are people in this world who assumed that they're smart, while everyone else is foolish. The truth is, she is the one who is foolish and naïve, don't you think?"

"Please forgive me, Your Majesty!" Shu Man'er was crying.

"Your Majesty, she is here now!" A guard announced with a cold voice. At the same time, they all heard Shu Man'er gasping, "Elder Sis!"

"Man'er! Why are you here?" Shu Man'er asked , surprised.

Shu Man'er knew that she had screwed up mightily this time. She grabbed Shu Mo'er's dress and cried again.

Shu Mo'er noticed Ye Chong then. She looked back at her sister, who was now crying all over the place, and seemed to deduce something from it. She cried out accusingly at Ye Chong, "You,

what did you do?"

"How dare you? Show your respect to the King!" The guard yelled at her, then kicked Shu Mo'er from behind her knees. Shu Mo'er cried out in pain and fell onto the floor on her knees.

Sun Sieha smiled coldly at her and said, "Shu Mo'er, I am not killing you now in consideration of your teacher, but don't think I will not do it in future. No one can stop me, not your teacher back then, and definitely not you!"

Sun Sieha seemed to recall something unpleasant from the past. His expression twisted menacingly before he finally got a hold of himself. However, his eyes were still shining threateningly when he said to Ye Chong, "I give these two women to you."

"I don't want them," Ye Chong said calmly.

Sun Sieha was taken aback. "Do you know what other people are willing to do to obtain these two sisters? Why won't you have them?"

"They're a nuisance," Ye Chong replied with one lifted eyebrow.

"A nuisance?" Sun Sieha was surprised, but laughed out loud, "Haha, indeed! You're absolutely right, absolutely! However, I, Sun Sieha, never accept returned gifts." The King said this with an air of dominance.

Ye Chong could not be bothered to respond. He stepped out of the car and said, "Remember to send the money over." He then vanished into the night.

Sun Sieha watched with amusement as Ye Chong made his exit.

He then turned back to the two women and said coldly, "From now on, you are both his. I don't care how you do it, but you must stay with him. If you can't achieve this, humph, then the Shu Family has no reason to continue existing. If you can get him interested in you, then you'll both be rewarded. Of course, the Shu Family will also benefit. You know what to do." The King took one

last look at the two sisters of the Shu Family, then waved them off. The two women left escorted by the King's guard.

Shu Mo'er looked very pale. Her arms were around her young sister, who was crying herself into a mess. Her lips were already bleeding from biting too hard on them. A late night breeze caressed her long hair. Her determined gaze showed how humiliated, lost and hopeless she felt.

...

Yi Ju Planet was now a very busy place. Skyscrapers covered the land, bringing life to the once quiet and desolate planet. It was now one of the most modernized planets in the vicinity. High end commercial centres and the advanced academic institutions could be found on this planet.

The Sang Tribe did not expand rapidly, but even so, they already had 52 planets under their power. These 52 planets had Yi Ju as their center. The area became a newly established territory, known by people now as the Yi Ju Zone.

Since Ye Chong was not there, the Sang Tribe could only decide through a vote on how to respond to the request for assistance from the Three Aristocratic Families. As expected, about 80 percent of them did not agree to travel so far to their aid. However, Sang Pu and his team gave them enough reason. ...

...

Qiu Man's competence in governance and Sang Pu's military strength allowed the commercial centre known as the Yi Ju Zone to flourish like never before. The greatest benefit they derived from this position was having enough funds. Newcomers who chose to move to the Yi Ju Zone also brought in plenty of resources and, more importantly, advanced technology.

As for the research organizations which were short of money, it was decided that the government would extend financial assistance

to them, even in the form of loans. This was because Qiu Man had enough funds. She had been trying to figure out how to spend the money in a way that could encourage growth in the place. This was one of the measures she had come up with.

Aried was short, and had been looked down by others because of this ever since he was a young boy. Nevertheless, he was an unconventional genius. This was because his theories were not acknowledged by any known research center, which refused to fund him because of his weird ideas.

He arrived on Planet Yi Ju to escape the red-tailed beasts. He saw the new policy in place to help academics, and decided to just try it out.

To his surprise, he passed the initial and a few subsequent interview rounds, and finally made it to the final round of interview. He also managed to meet a few legendary figures in the Yi Ju leadership, including the legendary beauty, Ms Qiu Man.

"Ms Qiu Man is more beautiful than the rumors suggested!" Aried thought to himself.

Qiu Man was used to this kind of attention. She coughed softly and smiled at the man, "You must be Mr Aried. A pleasure to meet you. We have looked over your proposed subject, 'V-shaped Spatial Techniques'. We were not familiar with your subject before this, so we have asked for opinions from a few experts in spatial science. They all agreed that your proposal is interesting. They cannot prove that it will work, but it is worth a look. Hence, we have decided to invest in your project."

Chapter 545: Another Negotiation

It almost felt like a dream came true for Aried, as he stood before this brand new laboratory filled with facilities of all wonders he saw every night. And he was coming with a filled pocket, a plump pocket full of gold to assist him in verifying the beliefs, the hypothesis in his mind, even though by terms he would have to let go of most of his research outcomes to his counterpart. It was still a deal, if it was not their sponsor, he would still be living in his dreams which never would manifest into reality.

He was also assigned an apprentice by Qiu Man, named Sang Kan.

It was a curious addition to his laboratory since the Sangs were the brightest family on the entire Yi Ju planet. They were the true ruler of the planet as they filled up majority of the authoritative level of hierarchy. They once vanquished yet they had recently resurfaced, out of the blue. They remained mysterious in the eyes of the people, with their Collision army rocking the world.

Sang Kan was assigned as an assistant but he was more like a student in the lab. He lacked the foundation of Space Science, however that did not obstruct him as Aried liked this little shy boy who put actual effort in learning. He was a quick and intelligent learner too, technically a perfect student for a 60-year-old researcher like Aried. Aried hoped that Sang Kan would be able to be his successor at one point, so whenever this young boy asked anything, Aried would be more than passionate in providing answers.

The Sangs were almost everywhere on Planet Yi Ju. One could see them serving every industry with their common tenacious diligence despite having a weak education background. Most masters adored the Sangs and that led to a bunch of green-eyed monsters in the apprenticeship.

The Sangs were developing rapidly, as countless medication as well as apparatuses were being transported to Sang Family Village which had received a complete overhaul by then. The population was blooming, life standards were elevating, yet their gratitude towards the great teacher, Ye Chong remained. They would probably still be living in the caves if the teacher never came.

Compared to those established aristocrats who had lived comfortably in glory for too long, the Sangs were hard workers. And today, a growing trend of emigration could be discerned among them, especially the youngsters who were required to first complete combat trainings at Archipelago since the old chief still recognized military training as the essential of their living. In the meantime they were also required to complete basic academic training.

So once the training was completed, emigration would occur. Those who passed the examination would head to Planet Yi Ju under the escort of the cargo fleet. On the planet, they would be distributed to all sorts of industries under apprenticeships of all known masters.

They lived up to Ye Chong's spirit as they swarmed upon the mechanic industries, while there were hardly anybody striving for the philosophies.

Every Sang worked intensely in the industry, as they had been abandoned by the world for too long. They had to chase after the footprints of the century as their blood boiled with their innate will to fight. It was a similar spirit to Ye Chong. Their lives had improved and no way they would want to turn back. They would charge, they would advance forward, with more glories and gold!

The name of their great teacher had slowly faded away from the mind of the residents on Planet Yi Ju, yet remained in the heart of every Sang who strived in search of their supreme spiritual leader.

The search was never once on halt all these years. The Sangs had

invested a considerable amount of workforce and assets yet there was no voice coming from their leader in the outer space.

It was heartbreaking.

Well, little the Sangs knew, their supreme leader was also the same heartbroken somewhere at the other corner of galaxy.

...(Back to Ye Chong)...

Early in the morning, people crowded Ye Chong's manor. They were of the nobility who grew extreme interest in his style after witnessing the battle that day. They would like to be his apprentices and with their prestigious social status in Sun City, they believed they could gain their teacher's attention with a petition!

That was what Sun Sieha would love to see. He was over the moon.

In the midst of the fiasco, Shu Mo'er and Shu Man'er stood among the crowd, without a single fatigue visible on their expression, as their chilly charm captured the attention of all young men around.

Everything went as Sun Sieha predicted. The outcome of the duel had reached the entire city in one night, the story grew sensationalized the more lips it reached, that Ye Chong had literally become an entity as if the demon in the latest version of the story. Nevertheless, the noble family had seen opportunities, potential in this devilish young man, especially under his majesty's constant effort of promoting hand-to-hand combats. So they sent all their best descendants to join the martial arts festival.

Mastering parapsychic sense would almost unavoidably involve one's talent, and not everyone was gifted with such talent, including a majority of the noble descendants in the city. Under the "helpful" culture promoted by forces in Eastern Cloud, they were humiliated by those gifted shooters of the upperclass. It was

darkness ahead for their future, until a spark showed up and illuminated the entire world for them, someone who was able to defeat 12 Level 6 shooters singlehandedly with brute force, someone named Ye Chong.

Passion had warmed the entire city.

And when Shu Man'er came to the scene with her sister, the atmosphere had only intensified further.

"Is that Shu Man'er? Wait, two of them?"

"Shu Man'er has an elder sister?!"

"Wow you are slow on the news, man. Yes she has a sister and both of them are Level 6, under the same master. Shu Mo'er was once unknown to the people only because she had been training at the outside alone."

"Tsk, such sisterhood. How many men's hearts must they shoot this time?"

"Meh. They would shoot everybody except you. Didn't you know? They want to be Master Ye's apprentice. If you want to at least have a glance upon their fairness you have to be fast, since they could be having a wild goose chase. Mhm? Well, Master Ye did not seem interested in taking them. Why, you ask? Think with your knees, what kind of a figure was Master Ye? He's the top craftsman in this Eastern Cloud! He could earn a full bank account even by just crafting a toy! Do you think he needs to carry out tuition classes for extra cash? Don't you remember he leisurely won a hundred and fifty millions in the last duel? Even the ruler feels like a hobo, that he would speak with cautious courtesy as he talked to Master Ye in person. He has both fame and money, no one would want to mess with him. So? What conclusion can we get? Taking in apprentices is totally unnecessary and bothersome for our Master Ye. Don't forget Master Ye had said it before, only 20 apprentices at most. Be there or be squared. Don't be sorry if you just so happened to be the person after the next when there

was only one slot left. Imagine if you get it, you get to be with the two beautiful sisters. Those eye candies are more than convincing, so you see... hmm?? Where did yo-Hey! Don't get on your mark yet! I'm not done yet!"

...(Back to Ye Chong's manor)...

"Hey! Master! Take me!"

"No! Take me! I'll clean the floor!"

"I'll clean the floor and the bathroom!"

"I'll clean the floor and the bathroom and the lawn!"

"I'll clean everything, including maste-wait, stop punching me, ah!"

There were a giant crowd awaiting for the great one to speak. And the great one was having a headache figuring out a solution. Formerly, he only intended to take a mere few members of nobility as apprentices, as agreed to the conditions with Sun Sieha. Then that "few" members had become that "few flocks" of members. He could see at least 3000 people standing by the gate, while there would be new fans joining ever few so often.

Out of sudden, an unmarked fighter machine zoomed towards Ye Chong's manor, Ye Chong could tell it was Sun Sieha's.

It soon landed at the lawn. It was in fact Sun Sieha who exited the crane and he was alone this time, there was no guardsman.

"I think this is more than what you told me," said Ye Chong as he glanced at the crowd outside.

"Hah!" Responded Sun Sieha, "Hah! It's just ... an accident. I really have no idea these youngster could be so fanatic about your achievement."

"I might have decided to cooperate with you on an agreement," Ye Chong was expressionless, "But this has clearly gone overboard."

Sun Sieha sighed helplessly, "I did not expect these to happen. I thought the crowd would appear only after you had won the national tournament at least. But the popularity grew so rapidly. I do not think it is plausible to turn down everything at this point. It would be a good chance to massively take in apprentices though, don't you think?"

"This is beyond what we have agreed," shook Ye Chong.

"Alright then. What's your proposition?" Sun Sieha obviously could do nothing to Ye Chong. He thought Ye Chong was a typical simple boy but in actuality Ye Chong was such a plotter, a cunning one too! Sun Sieha could not criticize, both instances they had dealt contained no loophole, which left Sun Sieha no choice but to obey whatever proposed. It was a terrible feeling for a lord to bow before another lord.

"If you are doing something beyond the agreement, you're against it. For that, you have to pay." Ye Chong began proposing, "I have no issue in taking in these people, with conditions however."

"What conditions?" raised Sun Sieha's brows.

"First, based on the current situation, I do not see the need in participating the tournament, thus I would like my entry to be revoked."

"Hmm..." Pondered Sun Sieha, "Not much of a problem, still you have to at least perform something during the tournament, like a showcase with a Level 8 shooter. Also, you have to come and attend my ceremony. I mean, basic exchange of courtesy? You would spare some pride to me right?"

"Okay." Ye Chong was fully agreed on this. He would no longer need to invest pointless efforts on that national tournament. He would save time and time was the most precious to him.

"Moving on, I have total free will to make ultimate judgement upon these people."

"Sure!" Sun Sieha was nonchalant, "No problem! Kill as many of them if you wish, all of them would never be succeeding the family business. Nobody would be against you just because you killed a few nobodies."

"Third, once any of them had completed my training, I own the priority in choosing them, while all the procedures in our agreement formerly remained unchanged, my authority remains."

"Okay, sure," replied Sun Sieha promptly. He was joyful that the master did not make a preposterous offer this time fortunately.

Chapter 546: Let's Get It Big!

It certainly felt great for Ye Chong to finally reach an agreement with the ruler of the city, especially when it was a win-win situation. Both of them got exactly what they wanted.

Apprenticeship? No problem. It was the bread and butter in Ye Chong's story.

It was not the first and surely not the last.

The processor had helped him undergo the first selection process to kick out impotent students but still there were about 1800 pupils to be further selected. Ye Chong did not seem pleased with the number of people.

And so, one week right before the ceremony, a news had blown up the entire city - the master craftsman of Eastern Cloud, a legend who defeated 12 Level 6 shooters with his own fists, had announced the official opening of recruitment for apprentices. It was not a rumor nor it was an urban legend cooked up during somebody's teatime. It was a fact, a pronounced order from the lord of the city himself, the royalty.

The brewing rumor before had been verified, and obviously the residents were immediately convinced. The rumor landed in the city like a bomb as the citizens heard the story of Master Ye defeating those advanced shooters while being unconvinced. It was too horrifying that it felt fictional until the royalty confirmed everything and Master Ye became a celeb soon after and there was a huge crowd at Master Ye's place, a very large crowd in fact.

The announcement detailed Master Ye's intention of picking up new apprentices, with a "requirement" which felt more like a "giveaway" to most of the citizens upon hearing it. Technically, one just had to be below 16 years old while having a healthy, functional body to join the audition. Once being admitted and passed the selection process, one would be given not only wages

from the royalty monthly, but also an opportunity to work for the government right away given that one passed the final trial.

Those in poverty had seen a silver lining in the sky. The youngsters were lured by the stable income as well as free accommodation and food, unlike those born with a silver spoon who were not particularly attracted enough to hit the street and force themselves through the crowd to read the announcement on the wall. However, upon hearing the news through their own network they remained interested as it was the sole pathway towards a bright future for those untalented in their family.

Crowds were flooding towards Ye Chong's manor, almost smashing the gate. Sha Ya with her ray gun was standing next to Ye Chong with a tensed expression, feeling lightheaded as she imagined if an actual uprising could happen, which a Level 8 shooter like her could never handle single-handedly.

There were at least a thousand of them.

"Hey kiddo! You started yet? Ain't nobody have the whole day for this! Make your move already!"

"You heard him!"

The crowd had grown restless as seeing the master standing still for the entire time.

That was when a flock of something came with an aerial wail.

It was a flock consisted of 40 transport units as well as 120 combat units, with a crest of royalty glossing under the sunlight.

"Wow! It's the royal military! Man that's wicked cool!"

"Wow!" Exclamations were heard as the people lifted their head upon the sunny sky. Those were the royal guards, although they did not form a huge organization, they were the best shadow fighters under his majesty, mysterious and hardly seen by the people.

As mentioned, they were supposed to be the last line of defense for his majesty, and they should not be here unless declared state of emergency. The royal guards' sudden debut was surprising to the nobles, as they had yet witnessed such a huge operation in the past. 40 transport units, 120 combat units, clearly one would not have witnessed that unless an invasion occurred.

Before the people could react, the combat units dispersed themselves. Like ants crowding a sugar cube, they circled around those transport units while they gradually landed forcing the people away on the ground.

People were curious as they were marveled at the shining crest. The royal guards were truly mysterious, even to those members of noble family. The transport units were visibly pricey for their design and the maximum weight they could withstand, and to be honest, even the first military force of the country only owned 80 of these, while on this probably insignificant occasion the royal guards had sent off 40, which displeased Du Feng and his mates a bit.

"Formation!" The guards shouted on top of their lungs as people saw the armed men marching off the transport units with no mercy in their eyes. The royal guards were astonishingly efficient as 4000 of them got into their formation in 3 minutes.

"Dang..." Du Feng muttered as he watched from the hill faraway.

"As expected from the ultimate defense line of his majesty," said Li Gui grimly, "You could feel the violence from a single stare. I feel the weakest of the force would have shooters of at least Level 6."

"Hmph," Du Feng snorted, "I can't nitpick anything. I mean, look at their equipment. Tsk, tsk, they just came in 40 giant crafts while we were looking like hobos standing here with our plastic toys."

"I must agree," nodded Li Gui, "We aren't at the same level as those royal guards. I do envy those fancy stuffs they have but it's

pointless to drool at them. I'm more curious of the purpose of their visit here, to be frank, especially when the royal guards only move upon his majesty's order. Why would his majesty send so many guards here? Did he intend to annihilate Master Ye?"

"Nah... Too much of a hassle to just 'annihilate' that Ye guy. A flock of combat units could have bombarded him into ashes, they don't even need to get into their formation," Du Feng rebutted.

The transport units blasted off into the air again, as the combat units tailed them zooming into the distance faraway.

At the front of the formation, there stood a buffed man with a scar which reached to his left eyes from the corner of his lips, looking like a giant centipede resting on his face. It was stunning and menacing... especially with his warrior physique standing there at a height of 185 centimeters.

His cold eyes glance around, his right hand was lifted, with his index finger pointing at the sun.

An order had been given.

The two frontmost rows of the guards disassembled themselves from the formation and had withdrawn their guns.

"Siege!"

"Siege!!!!!" The leaders of the both rows screamed as the guards began running, spreading as they hit the path ahead. The ray guns were aimed at the people, as they surrounded the entire crowd. People could not help but to back off a bit with a wryly smile seeing the cruelty in the guards' stare. There were several waves of parapsychic attack and people were overwhelmed, not even the talented Shu sisters could stand against the waves, let alone those untalented folks who were shaking on their feet.

The scarred commander expressionlessly trooped towards Ye Chong through the opening at the crowd. He gave a formal greeting, bowing, "Instructor Liao Sang reporting for duty upon

his majesty."

Ye Chong responded with a nod, "From now on, you and your subordinates would be under my command until you receive a return order from his majesty." The scarred man reminded Ye Chong of that super sniper back in the free space zone, the bodyguard of the little boy, who also had a scar across his face, just not as bulky as Liao Sang.

"Yes sir!"

The arrival of royal guards was a salvation to Ye Chong's plight, as it made every folk behave themselves. The commotion subsided as everyone knew what would be the consequence if any of them threw an egg at Master Ye.

Ye Chong waited, sitting still till 4 o' clock in the afternoon, while staring at the crowd of 20 thousand outside. The young men were restless at first, but they learned to be patient as they knew there would be an audition, and they would have a better performance if they preserve their stamina by resting on the ground. There were people who once disbelieved the announcement of royalty which seemed too good to be true, but the dramatic debut of the royal guards convinced them in every bit.

Did the royal guards solely serving the king actually came all the way here, with theatrical entrance, only to assist Master Ye in the audition? Where else could one find such grandness of a school open day?

Nevertheless, that was when the people felt a little uneasy. The fact that the king was so convinced of Master Ye's capability and sent his best men for assistance, then there is no doubt Master Ye would have very high standards in recruitment. Their fate would be at his great mercy and the likelihood of getting through the first stage had dampened.

And then... in the midst of intensity, Ye Chong stood up.

Attention stormed upon him as people hurled their gazes at him with a rapid turn at their head, including the scarred man, who had been fairly curious of this Master Ye ever since he got the order from the royalty. He had never gotten such unusual order from the royalty before in his entire life serving the king. What kind of mission was this anyway? It's not that he had better missions to do, in fact they had hardly receive any interesting order as they spent most of the time training in the field, which eventually made them the stronger military forces compared to the standard guards.

So finally they got something to work on and it turned out to be a mere leisure for Instructor Liao.

It was certainly strange to Instructor Liao for Master Ye was able to earn this much of trust from his majesty when his majesty was a person of discipline and paranoia. He had barely trusted anybody, well, not to an extent that he would give his guards away on a whim for a recruitment drive.

Instructor Liao was intrigued, but not from a political aspect. He just wanted to see who Master Ye was, the one who finished 12 Level 6 shooters single-handedly that managed to convince his majesty.

Heavy breaths could be heard in the midst of sudden silence, as people anticipated the great master to announce his requirements.

...

... ..

"So..." Ye Chong begun.

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... ..

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"All of you have been admitted. We'll meet here at 6 a.m.

tomorrow. Latecomers would not be entertained. Dismiss."

"What?"

"What did the master say?"

People were dumbfounded as rustles were perceived at the crowd. "Am I drunk? Or is the master drunk? Or is everybody drunk?"

"The master orders dismissal! So move now!" Instructor Liao raised his voice impatiently upon seeing rustling crowd. "You have 10 minutes! Anyone who stays after that would be immediately executed!"

And there was nobody at the last syllable uttered, well, except the Shu sisters.

"Knock them out," said Ye Chong as he pointed at them.

"Yes sir!" Instructor Liao sauntered to the sisters to deliver a surprising blow at their necks. They blacked out before they realized. "Gui Gui!" Instructor Liao did not even bother to take a look at those beauties as he shouted his soldier. Gui Gui had a pale face of a ghost, as if albino that even her fingers were pale as snow. It was quite a contrast to those well-tanned men in the armor. Her eyes were cold as ice, her actions were smooth as the glaze, which appeared rather threatening to the soldiers.

"Get these girls to your camp. Anyone who dares to taste them would be sliced!" Instructor Liao shouted.

Gui Gui responded with a formal bow, "Yes sir." She sauntered to the fainted sisters and lifted them to her shoulders and retreated to her former position in the formation after all.

Gui Gui's existence was an eye-opener to Ye Chong. He had raised his own army before so he knew how an army worked. It was rare to see a female blending so well in the army especially when it consisted a majority of males. The discipline was there and there was unity among them. One could clearly see the standard of this

army.

So the next problem would be a proper training ground that could accommodate a crowd of 20,000. However, it was not that difficult to solve.

That aside, there had not been much progress in his research. Though he did achieve something, including the instance where he finally crafted a few processors from scratches, despite being pretty substandard for its low level of processing ability according to the record in the microchips. Rather useless if one would say. It was not difficult to craft yet it was made out of Ye Chong's blood and sweat and that was under the assistance of those fancy stuffs like the organic cellular unit of these processing units he scavenged from Spectre. It might take him centuries before he made one out if without these stuffs.

The processors he made might not be powerful but he found somewhere to use them.

Ye Chong utilized the materials available and crafted simple mechs based on the design of a few engineering units. He attached the processors to them and made them into servant units. They served different functions so they had different designs. They lacked intelligence so they served one single function each but these were more than enough! They would help the mundane work!

The layout of his manor had already been plotted under the assistance of his detection system. When the processor had provided him the optimal proposal for the construction, all he had to do was to insert these partitioned tasks to each servant units, then magic would happen.

That sounded like a breakthrough by Master Ye but he never had the chance to test these units and he was given this major project to handle. So he only could use these units right away, to build a giant training dojo that could accommodate the large crowd. Well

it was not an exquisitely designed dojo to begin with. So it was not entirely unmanageable. If he had those standard engineering units he could have finished the construction in 30 minutes.

But he only had these simple bots.

Instructor Liao was setting up the base camp. He and his army did not need help from Master Ye. Setting up camp was the bread and butter for military.

The night came slowly as the soldiers chatted happily round the campfire. It was a joyful trip with such a simple mission, especially when their routine consisted of march-till-fall activities back in the training camp.

Gui Gui sat at one spot silently. Her pale face convinced people they were as if sitting by her ghastly flame. Nobody had the courage to sit next to her. She was the only female in the army and people feared her, not even Instructor Liao would get closer to her. The sisters remained unconscious as placed at the wilted patch of grass nearby.

Instructor Liao gave a fierce bite at his drumstick and he closed his eyes. A strong wave of psychokinetic spread to the surrounding, reaching everybody who zipped their mouth all of sudden and began meditating nearby.

"Listen up punks! If any of you ever fall asleep meditating tonight, I'll give him a taste of my personal training the morning after!" said Instructor Liao fiercely. "Close your eyes! In silence! Meditate. Nobody open their eyes till informed!"

"F*cking hell, you incapable kiddos and your lack of training just pisses me off every time." Instructor Liao threw his anger as he brandished the bitten drumstick which was then tossed into his huge mouth to be chomped, along with the bone, into a million pieces while he strolled out of the camp.

Gui Gui, who seemed to sense something, got up and tailed after.

Instructor Liao gave her a nod upon seeing her. They headed to the southwest corner of the manor agilely like beasts on a runaway. Such speed from capable shooters.

At one bush on the slope, they peeked something shocking.

There were a handful of strange things gathering up into a team.

The leader seemed to be a spider-like creature, with 8 long feet and a flat broad cavity. It was a machine, with a pronounced height about 5 meters, a breadth about 10 meters. It looked terrifying.

"What the hell are those things?" Instructor Liao could not help but to inhale as he trembled a bit.

Gui Gui's eyes enlarged for a brief moment and she responded softly, "Looks like a new kind of machine to me."

And out of the blue, the spider reached its blade-like cavity to the ground. Before Instructor Liao and Gui Gui said something, glaring lights came from the blade and peeled the ground off!

Both of them were shocked to complete silence and their eyes enlarged like saucers.

The beeping continued as the spider creature reached its beam of light across.

A floating truck equipped with shovel were following after, moving those rocks sliced off the ground, further polishing the rocks underground. In the end a rocky training dojo could be identified. The process went on as the beam shifted to the edges and shaped the dojo into square.

Then there was a 4-legged machine about half a meter tall coming into the scene with its square box on its back, with a broad beam discharging from below which left a row of perfectly circular dent on the ground. It looked like a ... mini pile driver?

The two soldiers continued observing, only to see more and more

strange machines joining the construction. They were small and had bizarre designs yet somehow the two soldiers could perceive the functions at one glance.

But well, what the heck? Was this construction going a bit too fast?

Instructor Liao glanced at his clock. What? It had only been an hour and there was a dojo coming out of nowhere? That looked more like a paranormal activity to both of them by then.

"Holy crap. Those are pretty good stuffs!" said Instructor Liao, rubbing his palm eagerly with his eyes peering at that spider machine. Who cares if it sliced the ground well? It would be the best machine for slicing people! Instructor Liao might be from the highly regarded royal guards but he had never laid his hands on such an interesting machine before.

So many stuffs to get! Especially that strange liquid! Instructor Liao could sense the surface of the rocks growing stronger by times! The liquid could be the key to an unbeatable stronghold! Simply spray them at the walls then their stronghold would not even bulge under the deadliest shot! Talk about a great defense!

"Who was that?" asked Ye Chong as he heard something. He did not notice them before because of the distance and he was concentrating on his work, but it was that loud voice of Instructor Liao that alerted him.

"Hah! It's us, Master Ye." Instructor Liao was not feeling shy at all, as he greeted Ye Chong normally. Gui Gui pondered awhile before she followed the instructor.

Ye Chong took a look at both of them who nodded at him and he got back to his work. The dojo had just been coated with a layer of strengthening reagent. It was not completed yet. It still needed another reagent or the pillars would break because of the temperature change.

The miniature mobile sprinkler was looking like a floating cocoon in the air as Ye Chong caught it and began pouring in a pale greenish liquid.

"Master Ye, what is this? What does it do?" asked Instructor Liao interestingly, approaching Ye Chong.

"These are strengthening reagents," replied Ye Chong as he poured the fluid. "It further strengthens the structure of a material specifically, unlike the normal reagents."

"Oh..." Instructor Liao nodded although he wasn't sure if he understood. "That sounds great! Can it strengthen the structure of a human body too?"

Ye Chong sealed the lid tight and sent the sprinkler off to the training ground.

"Back off," instructed Ye Chong.

"Why?"

"It's highly toxic."

Instructor Liao was smiling as the corners of his lips shook, while Gui Gui was already nowhere to be seen nearby...

Chapter 547: Festival

Liao San could not help but to return to the base camp with bitter resentment.

Curses! If it was not because I had no other choices...

He whined, expressing his hatred towards the merchant who had just pulled a daylight robbery upon him. Fifty million? Was he out of his mind? Was he aware of how many tons of weapon one could purchase with fifty million? Those thieves at the logistics were as if angels compared to this satanic entity!

If he did become the head of the logistics, hell knows what could happen...

Liao San shuddered at the thought of it.

Well, the story was not as terrifying as Liao San had described. Liao San only enquired Ye Chong regarding those funny toys he had at his lawn, whether Ye Chong could sell to him one of them. Ye Chong did nod to the request promptly, "Only at a cost of fortune," he said. Liao San was overjoyed, it was not going to be a problem as long as the pennies could seal the deal for him. The royal guards had all the money they wanted so no hassle if it only involved money. Yup, not a problem, till Ye Chong made his offer directly, "50 million, per piece." There were 5 of them, so that would be a whooping 250 million for all 5. "Oh, and you only get to make the purchase once. Only once, I would not sell them anymore after this."

Such bargain...

Liao San froze at the offer. This was not a daylight robbery anymore. This was clearly a daylight pillage! The royal guards might be very well-off, that did not mean they would agree on a mindless deal! No way in their pride they would withdraw that large portion of their funds just for a few pieces o- "Well

apparently you aren't that interested, I'm sorry..." That was when Ye Chong shrugged, looking regretful. Liao San almost launched his fists on that pretentious thief! But he remembered that this very thief was also the very master who defeated 12 Level 6 shooters single-handedly. His fury then was nowhere to be found.

Eventually he just watched Ye Chong nonchalantly leaving on his moving sprinklers.

In actual fact, he had not recovered from the shock just now. Ye Chong did finish constructing a training ground within two hours. If only such efficiency was found in military construction, the kingdom would be formidable, terrifyingly formidable. Well, if he had those machines in the first place that is.

This became his fantasy at last. Even the military would hesitate at the price of these machines. It was 250 million after all, only to be boomed into nothing by a single missile from the enemy if unlucky.

Unlike Liao San, Ye Chong found his offer rather reasonable. These automated engineering units contained far more precise and advanced design compared to those he sold to Sun Sieha. Well, even the cannons were sold at 20 million. How would these fully automated engineering machines be much cheaper then? It took Ye Chong great effort to craft them too, since most minerals in the recipe were not local. He had to eye those in his inventories, which were limited from the beginning. But he did not, he had to preserve them. So he succumbed to the use of woods at the place, though obviously both the quality and versatility would be very inferior compared to metals. These wood pieces might add up to something but the process was not simple. Moreover, the machines had a built-in processor, low grade, a good stuff still. 50 million was totally fine for the magnificence.

Ye Chong did not feel anything in particular regarding the rejection. He was not in need of filling up his pocket anyway. His pockets were both full in fact, with the 150 million he won from

the gamble last time and the monthly income of 40 million from the royalty. He had not maximized these newly crafted machines too. He would not want to sell it away only to go through the tedious process of crafting new ones again.

Currently, Ye Chong's manor was too crude to be called a base so, there will be renovation. An underground base it would be! It would not only be much safer, but a more concealed spot too. Furthermore, he only needed these machines to do all the jobs for him. He did also think of adding more members to the construction team so he could get his base faster.

...(Meanwhile back at Sun Sieha)...

"What?!" The moment when his majesty heard the report from Liao San, the entire palace could hear his raging scream. "Liao San are you from Stone Age or something? Have you never seen this much of money at our royal account before? And you backed away from a mere price like this?" Unlike Liao San, his majesty could well recognize the value behind these machines. He would buy them at any cost, even twice the price Ye Chong offered. He had heard from Master Karu before, Ye Chong did possess a craftsmanship of technology 50 years ahead of them at the very least, thus the high respects towards his every craft as they were rather intrigued to study them.

The only chance to buy probably the greatest invention of the decade had just been swept to the drain under the hasty decision of his own man. How would his majesty not rage at this?

Five forty in the morning, there was an army of people standing before Ye Chong's manor. No one would certainly miss such a great chance of ascending as one of the talented members of the society for they lacked the gift in mastering parapsychic sense. They also thirsted strength, authority, wealth, glory like the shooters but it was that lack of gift which had given them the capital punishment of their life in the first place so Ye Chong's tutorial came like a silver lining in the sky for them.

The crowd cloaked the manor like a cluster of dark clouds, yet there was only silence, concealed in a certain obedience as the royal guards watched with stern solemnity.

It was 6 in the morning as Ye Chong nodded at Liao San.

"Time's up!" Liao San's scream echoed in the midst of silence, brutally like his voice rang, the guards broke into a line of formation, blocking the latecomers after the master's nod.

"Order!" Ye Chong raised his voice. "You have 30 minutes to break them into groups of 50, each with a leader."

Liao San had an eyeroll upon seeing the slothful folks. It was not an easy chore to place these slow rolling eggs into different baskets but Ye Chong was the commander, his order stood and absolute obedience was expected from Liao San. Liao San was still an experienced commander after all, "Yes sir!" Liao San replied on top of his lungs as he turned to the folks with a threatening glare, "The 400 of you punks get over here! Each of you pick a number of 50, by hook or by crook, I want to see groups here!" Well he had 4000 subordinates, so he only needed to that the 1/10 of them to get the lambs into the pens.

The 400 soldiers came out of the team promptly as they sprinted towards the people at a speed of a beast, a brutality of a beast too. If someone decided to not obey them, violence would be served. The soldiers sank into the crowd and dragged a number of ladies, putting them into a team, including the Shu sisters.

In no time 400 teams could be discerned at the field.

Ye Chong was going to hold a class of 20,000. Assuming he did recruit the students by traditional interview and the mundane meet-and-greet, it would take him forever. So these are the things to be discarded for efficiency, especially when these people came from all walks of life, all colors of soul, a military approach would be better, something that was considered bread and butter for him - just like the time he did with the Sangs. The approach would be

the most secure, with the least likelihood of seeing rebellion.

The group of people marched into the newly built training ground. No doubt they were fascinated by the magnificence, they had never seen a training field such colossal, a visual impact clearly it was. There were all sorts of strange machines, the ground was polished like mirror yet felt sturdy like rocks. "Such budget..." some people whispered. They could not imagine the potential amount of investment behind this foundation. Moreover, the training ground was situated at the valley between two slopes, making it more mysterious.

As there were the actual military soldiers leading their way, everybody got into their position almost immediately after. Ye Chong was on the stage of rock at the front of the ground.

It was going to be an assembly, with a speech from Ye Chong. Everybody expected that as they lifted their head, including the royal guards who were as curious of what inspiring words would come from the great master.

Ye Chong gave a look around. "I am Ye Chong, and I'll be your teacher today onwards," he spoke slowly, "which means, the entire valley would be off-limits. Nobody would be allowed to leave. Training would be tough but no failure would be allowed, no one would be retreating, no one I repeat."

The folks were shocked but they remained calmed as pressured by the constant glare from the soldiers nearby.

"All of you might have not been exposed to close-combats, but it is totally fine, learn it today onwards but I must warn you, it would have a much higher physique requirement compared to those shooter trainings. So, for starters, there would be physical training to boost your base stamina."

"Move!"

The crowd boiled as they were shouted to jog. Well, that sounded

really simple, even the folks felt bewildered, annoyed of the pointless-looking training.

That lasted till the close-50th round of the jogging session, during which most of them almost tripped themselves fainting, that was also when they were informed that food would not be provided to anyone who failed completing the run

Liao San skillfully pressured these folks like his own soldiers and it was quite a sight to see a crowd of twenty grands running in the dusty field. One could hear the roaring gasps along with the frantic splashes of the soldiers' whipping.

These folks were just a bunch of spoiled brats grown up in wealth and their physique was weak to begin with. A number of them just suffered a force shutdown and collapsed during the run. But no unconsciousness could salvage them as a splash of cold water was given by Liao San, "RUN!" The command rang thunderously again.

On the first day, only 1/3 of the crowd could finish the run, which most of them consisted of those from the poverty. They were fed generously, though they were still fatigued. That was when they understood the joy of a hard-earned meal. However, they knew it well enough, that the training was just the beginning. Oh well, it was fine, the bowl of rice turned more sumptuous as they looked at the so-called noblemen lying dead on the ground.

The training course on the second day was again a run of 50 rounds. There were improvements as more people were able to complete the course.

Liao San had loved every second of the training. It was so fun to mess with punks this many, especially when they were the spoiled nobilities who reacted ridiculously towards any form of harsh commands.

Life in the valley was as boring as one could imagine and the folks had been charred by the sun in the past few days. Their lips were cracking, even the lovely girls like Shu sisters. Gui Gui was

heartless enough to press them moving. Their fair white skin had been grilled gracelessly.

"I wanna go home!"

"Please, let... let me die!"

"Did I ask you to leave?"

The boys were whipped to forget the incompetent thought, putting them to the ground. And nobody asked to leave after that.

The run of 50 rounds had become something effortless for everyone on the 7th day, and Ye Chong decided to increase it to 80. "Take over everything from here," said Ye Chong, "The next thing I will check on this team would be the result, and that would be only when everybody could run 300 rounds and every hundred rounds should not take more than an hour and half. That would be the passing line. It better be within a month."

Alright, that sounded tedious indeed, even to a trained soldier like Liao San who frowned upon it. Ye Chong had a lot of works to do and that was the entire point he asked Sun Sieha to send his royal guards to the place.

In the next few days, Ye Chong crafted a few more engineering units and they had dug 20 meters into the ground under his manor.

That was one thing off the list and now there would be a festival by Sun Sieha. That posed zero attraction to Ye Chong but Sun Sieha sounded persistent in his words, "Oh well, I'll go and check this festival out..."

On the day, Sun Sieha sent his men to pick Ye Chong up.

Ye Chong got to the palace which had been furnished with bouquets of flowers and a fresh red carpet all the way to the throne. The guards were well-dressed as their chests rose high as their spirits. The conference room was occupied by guests who were clearly from the similar majesty, acting as the noblemen

themselves.

Ye Chong had again, attracted everybody's attention the moment he entered the room. He was the cover story of the recent news after all. Nevertheless, he was a person hard to get hold of. He did not bother to have complete interaction with anybody than his majesty. The lord clearly adored this fine young man and the wealthy ladies were intrigued as well.

Ye Chong picked a corner and got himself seated, as he could feel the constant stares from the people. That certainly did not feel good, he rather became the invisible man of the party room.

He closed his eyes as he maintained his breath in relaxation.

The ladies seemed unimpressed by his lack of socialization as they retrieved their passionate stares and resumed their gossips.

"The lord is here!" Announced one guard as Sun Sieha walked into the room. Loud applause was heard as people stood up, the royalties bowed, "Long live the lord! The greatest birth of them all! God's with the lord!"

"It's more important to have all of you to be with me." Waved Sun Sieha politely.

The following schedule was mundane. Technically the royalties led their family to greet Sun Sieha while Sun Sieha would return them some warm compliments. It felt like a reunion during the new year and the repetition bored Ye Chong while the interviews, of those fathers presenting gifts along with their beloved sons or trustworthy military commander, made Ye Chong question the meaning of his existence.

"The Western Frost is here!" Announced the guard, disrupting the friendly atmosphere of the conference room. Western Frost... the country had been Eastern Cloud's nemesis yet they had sent a man there on a festive night of Eastern Cloud's greatest leader. What was the meaning of this?

A moment of hostility was found in Sun Sieha's glimpse, "Oh," he forced a smile, "Such rare guest, let him in."

The messenger was a middle-aged man, with nothing unique discernible in his physical appearance, while a cage in dark cloak followed, about 5 meter tall.

"Mu Chen came under the command of my lord from Western Frost, to greet your majesty a happy birthday."

Sun Sieha grinned stiffly, "Please, get up."

"How was the king of Western Frost? I've been hearing news of his illness." Concerned Sun Sieha, as part of the act of making conversation.

"Our king has been in the pink of health. Your Majesty had our gratitude. I do wonder however, of where Your Majesty had perceived such news."

"In the pink of health eh..." Sun Sieha nodded. "Great. I still would be amused in the next few years then. I must say your king is rather a decent opponent to play with, unlike the fool in Southern Land. I'll certainly be lonely if I would lose such an opponent." The words came sharp.

"Long live King Sun Sieha!" shouted the royalties as impressed by words of his majesty.

Mu Chen's expression changed. He had heard various stories of the new king in Eastern Cloud, though quite a number of them were degrading. He was informed that the new king had charisma and it was totally justifiable while also terrifying as Western Frost would have a hard time dealing with this king.

"Thank you for the compliments, Your Majesty. As ordered by my lord, I have come here to deliver this wonderful gift."

"Oh." Sun Sieha gave a smile, "I must say I'm rather intrigued, of what gift your lord has prepared for me. It must be great, so great..."

"My lord has told me that Eastern Cloud is a land rich of crops, unlike Western Frost which had been blissed by the frigidity... However, our men are the bravest, for our shooters were able to venture deep into Darkniss and capture this mysterious beast, only to be given to Your Majesty as a token of our diplomacy. I heard that only the true brave ones could overcome such beast and I had never seen the strange beast before. I deeply apologize for the abruptness for we were short of time. I was not able to inquire Your Majesty regarding this beast. I believe that Your Majesty is fully aware of such beast, even have witnessed it before, since ... Eastern Cloud has also a handful of brave ones? So please, your majesty, enlighten me, a mere nobody as well as the other people from Western Frost, who are also intrigued of your greatness."

"I see." Sun Sieha snorted, "There was such strange beast? Well, show me then, let me see how strange it is."

"Yes, Your Majesty. Immediately." He pulled the cloak away.

Sharp gasps were heard in the crowd, even the ladies dropped their cups and fans.

Ye Chong sprung from his seat, his eyes were glaring.

Chapter 548: Contest

A red-tailed beast! It was a red-tailed beast! Ye Chong could not believe his eyes. This was the creature, alright. It was a juvenile, with a pair of light red eyes on its angular head. It was young, but the eyes betrayed its vicious nature. The creature looked worn out. The five-meter tall cage was too small for it, such that it must curl in on itself to fit inside. There were no visible injuries on its body. The light red colored arrowhead tail was not fully mature yet. The red-tailed beasts that Ye Chong had seen before had arrowhead tails that were crimson red in color. The maturity of a red-tailed beast was not determined by its size, but by the color of its tail – the redder the arrowhead tail, the stronger the creature.

The only thing that surprised Ye Chong currently was that this creature had five fingers. By his experience, an eight-fingered red-tailed beast was the pinnacle of strength, while six-fingered red-tailed beasts were equivalent to a human tribe's chieftain. Five-fingered red-tailed beasts were not very strong, but they were still quite capable of destruction. This particular red-tailed beast he was looking at had a blue tinge on its body, and he had never seen anything like it before.

Why would there be red-tailed beasts here?

Ye Chong was intrigued. He never expected to have red-tailed beasts in this world. He heard it clearly from the ambassador – Darkniss, the place where the creature was from. Ye Chong had heard of Darkniss a few times. He knew that there were metals there, the so-called gravestones that Sha Ya and the others had told him about. There were also plants like Gold Leaves in the place.

Suddenly, a bold idea came to Ye Chong – could the red-tailed beasts have entered He Yue Galaxy from Darkniss? Was Darkniss home of the red-tailed beasts?

Ye Chong found himself face with many questions.

Sun Sieha did not recognize the red-tailed beast. He asked with faint surprise, "So it's a mysterious creature. Call Xuan Ning here, perhaps he'd seen it before."

The other councillors were also curious of the creature. Few of them had ever seen any animal as big as this. The red-tailed beast looked worn out, but they could still imagine the strength that came with it.

Mu Chen maintained a thin smile on his face throughout.

After a moment, Xuan Ning arrived. He was a man in his thirties, with thick eyebrows on a pair of large eyes. He looked like an honest and respectable man.

"Xuan Ning, reporting for duty!" Xuan Ning saluted in military fashion.

"Alright. You're here because I'd like you to have a look at this strange creature. It was captured in Darkniss. Have you seen it before?" Sun Sieha asked gently.

Xuan Ning looked towards the huge cage placed in the centre of the assembly room, and then quickly averted his gaze. "I have, Your Majesty."

"Oh, tell us more." Sun Sieha grew interested. He had travelled far and wide when he was young, but had never been to Darkniss, known for its dangers.

"Five years ago, when I had just reached Level 8, I decided to visit Darkniss. Darkniss is known to be home to many strong creatures, and is a good place for training. I invited two friends to come along. They were Level 7 shooters. The three of us made our preparations for the visit."

Xuan Ning recalled what happened back then. Everyone in the assembly room was absorbed in his story.

"We entered the Desert from Dual Forest. The journey was smooth at first. The sandlizards did not hinder us. We moved

quickly. Later, we encountered sandscorpions. That was horrible. The sandscorpions always appear in hundreds or thousands, spread out for dozens of kilometers. Fortunately for us, there were no sandstorms, or we would have laid down our lives there. After that, we entered the Mist, where a perpetual purple mist covered the area."

Ye Chong felt his heart tightened. He had heard of the Desert and the Mist, but he never knew that the mist was purple in colour. However, even he was aware of it earlier, he would not have associated it with the red-tailed beasts, for he had not seen the creature here yet. For now, it was still too early to tell if the purple mist was the same as the one he had seen in his own world.

No one noticed Ye Chong's unsettled look. They were all absorbed in Xuan Ning's story.

"Visibility is low, but as shooters, our parapsychic sense helps us to navigate. In the Mist was a thick forest. Vines and branches surrounded us. Humidity was high, and there was no sunlight. It was a place that was difficult for shooting. We were lucky to have avoided anything really troublesome. There was only a pack of gliresaur we had to deal with."

Xuan Ning described his experience mildly, but his audience could imagine how terrifying the battle must have been.

"After we crossed the Mist, we finally entered Darkniss. There is no sunlight in Darkniss, but there are strange plants that give off light in there. There is also flowing lava that glows a fiery red here and there, painting a red tinge on anything you see in there."

When Xuan Ning began to talk about Darkniss, his voice turned low and serious.

"Once we entered Darkniss, we proceeded carefully. We knew the place was dangerous. We walked along one of the lava flows that was about 20 meters wide. However, we had our first dangerous encounter on our first day in Darkniss. We were attacked by 14

black-striped gray dragons. They were huge, standing up to about seven or eight meters tall. The creatures were fast in the air, and had strong and sharp beaks and claws. All three of us were injured from that battle. The dragons swooped down from above. We shot them to death, but they were coming down too quickly. We were injured by the gravestones that were sent flying from their crashing into the ground. Fortunately, we were not too heavily injured, and the experience taught us to be more careful. We would never have survived the visit otherwise."

Xuan Ning looked like he had not fully gotten over the encounter yet.

"After that, we encountered other creatures, but none were as strong as the black-striped gray dragons. On our 13th day in Darkniss, we lost our way. We were panicking. That was also the day we met one of this strange creature. Our records don't have anything on it, so that was our first time seeing it. The one we met was stronger than this one in the cage. It was fighting against a pack of black-striped gray dragons. There were no less than 30 of the dragons dead on the ground when we saw them. The black-striped gray dragons were fast, but not as agile as the unknown creature. Its arrowhead tail was quick and deadly. The sharp beaks and claws of the dragons did not leave any marks on the unknown creature. We stayed in our dark hiding spot until all the black-striped gray dragons were killed by the unknown creature. We counted the number of dragon bodies on the ground. The tally came up to 55."

The people in the assembly room were disturbed by Xuan Ning's story. They realized now how powerful the creature in the cage was. Some of them almost called out for the guards. The red-tailed beast seemed to notice the fear and panic of the people around it. Its light red eyes gleamed condescendingly.

"Oh, so this officer did not catch the strange creature," Mu Shen commented with mock surprise.

Xuan Ning ignored him entirely and continued, "This creature is not yet mature, but no human can catch it alive. I don't think it's possible without deploying a huge fleet of fighters."

"Then how do you think this particular animal was caught?" Mu Shen asked Xuan Ning with a smile.

Xuan Ning replied coldly, "Aside from strong creatures, Darkniss also has all kinds of poisonous things. Any shooter who visited Darkniss would know that water puddles found in the place are not safe to drink from. I've seen a tumoric bear drank from a puddle where tiny blue flowers were growing. After that, the tumoric bear became weakened. Its body had a shade of blue, just like this creature we have here. I would guess that this creature had drank the same kind of poison, and was later found by someone. The fact that there are no visible wounds on this creature supports my theory. What do you think, Sir Mu?"

Xuan Ning spoke confidently, supporting his argument with sound evidence. He looked at Mu Shen sharply.

Mu Shen squirmed inside and replied with a softened tone, "As mentioned earlier, I know nothing about these things. Sir Xuan Ning has opened my eyes. Sir Xuan Ning is truly knowledgeable." Xuan Ning's deductions were accurate. The creature was not captured by them. It was a tribute from a few shooters who entered Darkniss to the King of Western Frost.

Xuan Ning was not interested in exchanging further words with Mu Shen. He bowed to Sun Sieha. "Your Majesty, I take my leave."

Sun Sieha was pleased to see Mu Shen intimidated. He was familiar with the temperament of this particular subordinate of his. "Alright, you may leave."

Xuan Ning turned to bow to the other nobilities in the assembly room. The nobles returned the gesture before Xuan Ning left the assembly room.

"Who is he?" Ye Chong asked the person next to him.

The noble recognized Ye Chong. He immediately replied respectfully, "Master Ye, he is the Commander of King's Guards, one of the strongest shooters in Eastern Cloud. He reached Level 8 by the age of 25, and a man of great experience. He is said to be the shooter closest to reaching Level 9 in the past five decades."

"I see." Ye Chong nodded and turned away.

The noble finally had a chance to talk to Ye Chong, but Ye Chong did not give him a chance to continue the conversation. He simply closed his eyes again.

The remainder of the meeting was dull and uninteresting. Ye Chong began to feel sleepy.

Nonetheless, there was something important he had to do later – his demonstration show for the National Combat Tournament.

Ye Chong kept his word to Sun Sieha, and did his part to the letter. Sun Sieha admired this side of him.

That afternoon, the National Combat Tournament officially began.

...

Duan Qian had arrived in Su City five days ago. In these five days, he got to know the flourishing city. Duan Qian had delicate features, and an air of naivety typical of young people. However, he had a certain steadiness in him. Unlike other shooters, his gait was confident. He was here for the National Combat Tournament.

He had his eyes opened in these few days. Su City was crowded with people. There were Level 6 and 7 shooters everywhere. Half the people on the streets were shooters, and half of these shooters were at least Level 6.

Strong fighters from all over Eastern Cloud had come to gather in Su City, but no one dared to cause trouble. Duke Warren had

assigned Xuan Ning, a close aide to His Majesty, to be in charge of security in Su City. Xuan Ning was a big name known to all shooters. He was the strongest of the strong, known not only for his strength that was close to Level 9, but also his ruthlessness. Thus, Su City became even safer than usual.

Duan Qian had registered for the Combat Tournament and received his schedule. He was due in the first round of the Tournament, for better or worse.

Where there was a competition, there would be a betting pool. However, no one could find any information on Duan Qian. To everyone's surprise, the Shooter Association did not have his name in their records.

Duan Qian was not a shooter.

He was born in a family with combat history. His father was a nameless combat expert, who worked as a merchant. Since he was prone to sickness when he was young, he began to learn a few moves from his father. They were not particularly powerful moves, but they kept him healthy. Later on, he was found to be talented in parapsychic control, and sent to study under a capable shooter.

He was everything people expected from him. Even though he was the youngest student of his teacher, his parapsychic energy was the strongest. His teacher hoped that he would achieve Level 6 by age 16. That would be an achievement worthy of a prodigy in the world of shooters.

Duan Qian was not interested in being a shooter, however. His interest lay in combat. Once, he channeled his parapsychic energy into a combat move without intending to, and crushed a rock with his fist. That made him even more eager to study the combination of combat and parapsychic energy.

With this objective in mind, Duan Qian trained hard. His inborn talent helped him grasp some key points in this endeavor.

However, his decision to go down this path was met with strong resistance from his parents and teacher. His father, who taught him combat in the first place, was against him. They thought that a shooter who could reach Level 6 by age 16 would have a much better future than a combat expert.

Nevertheless, Duan Qian persisted. He trained even harder so that his combat skills could one day be good enough to prove them wrong.

He did not give up on parapsychic control for combat. Instead, he trained his parapsychic control just as hard. Currently, his parapsychic control was just as good as that of a Level 6 shooter. Since his parapsychic control was strong, he could quickly detect his opponent's intentions and changes in their parapsychic waves. Besides, his own parapsychic waves could interfere with other shooters effectively.

To qualify for the National Combat Tournament, he had fought his way from early local matches to Su City. His teacher and parents were shocked by his achievement.

Young people were often ambitious. Some wanted fame, others wanted money. Duan Qian wanted to let the whole world know that shooters were not the only strong fighters!

Duan Qian was now in the Tournament resting area. The Tournament would begin with a Demonstration Contest before his turn came.

The idea for a Demonstration Contest was conceptualized since long ago. It was mostly participated by long-time and well-known combatants, who would fight against each other and explain the intricacies captured within the battle. The concept was popular amongst the audience. For this national level tournament, the participants were most likely the top combatants in the country. True experts would have better insights in combat compared to amateurs – all shooters knew this. It was a rare opportunity to

listen to these experts talk about their specialty.

...

(In Eastern Cloud Combat Stadium.)

The Combat Stadium could house 200 thousand people at a time. In terms of area coverage of any building structure, it was second only to Su City's landing field. The national Combat Stadium was now filled to the brim with people. Sun Sieha's arrival brought on the first wave of excitement in the stadium. The crowd cheered, and Sun Sieha felt invigorated by his people. He waved to them in greeting as his image was displayed on a huge screen for everyone in the stadium to see.

"Long live the king!" The voices from 200 thousand people thundered like a tsunami wave.

Sun Sieha's body shook a little as his emotions overcame him. No king would be unmoved by the strong passion of his people.

Mu Shen was also invited to watch the tournament. He was briefly unsettled by the thundering cheers, but quickly composed himself.

"My brave warriors, let the fighting begin!" Sun Sieha's short and powerful announcement marked the beginning of the National Combat Tournament.

Prince Desnio was tasked with hosting the Demonstration Contest and the first match by the king himself, probably because of his colorful narration of Ye Chong's match last time.

"Alright, my friends, the wildly anticipated National Combat Tournament has just begun. I know that many of you have been waiting for this. Let me just say that that is exactly the same for me.

"First up is the Demonstration Contest. The Demonstration Contest this time is the most special out of all the ones we've held. I think you can all guess which two masters will be going on stage,

right? Haha!" Prince Desnio grinned slyly.

"Let me ask you all, who is the most popular person recently in Su City? Is it His Majesty? Oh, no it's not, even though it's His Majesty's birthday today." Prince Desnio joked about Sun Sieha, but Sun Sieha did not mind his uncle's jest. He smiled in return.

"It was one man against 12 Level 6 shooters, and that man now has 20 thousand students under him. The first Master in close range combat in our country, and possibly in the whole wide world – Ye Chong! Let me tell you, Master Ye is not only a Master in Close Range Combat, but also our Chief Weaponsmith. Today, you will all get to witness a form of combat that was never seen before. I guarantee that you will be surprised. Truth is, I'm a big fan of Master Ye, not just because he's a strong fighter, but also because he'd won 10 million ao each from Legion Legate Ming Xiao and Duke Warren in a bet." Prince Desnio added with humour.

"A Master in Close Range Combat? What kind of title is that?" Mu Shen thought to himself with disinterest.

Chapter 549: How Does One Look Fabulous?

"And who will be Master Ye's opponent? You wouldn't have guessed it! Haha, it's time to reveal the answer! Let us call out his name - Xuan Ning!" Prince Desnio cried enthusiastically.

"Oh, it's Xuan Ning!" "Xuan Ning!" The crowd roared fervently.

Xuan Ning was a very influential figure in Eastern Cloud, with many loyal worshipers. He was the symbol of strength and power, a 30-year-old shooter in his prime, and a small step away from reaching Level 9. It was an achievement that few could hope to match.

The audience in the National Combat Stadium erupted in joy. It did not matter whether the combat matches later were up to expectation - the Demonstration Contest itself was worth the trip here.

Ye Chong and Xuan Ning entered the ring at the same time, and studied each other.

"Good day," Xuan Ning greeted without expression.

"And to you," Ye Chong returned the gesture with equal coldness.

This was only a combat demonstration. They were only required to show a few moves, not actually put up a serious fight. Sun Sieha's request was simple - Ye Chong only had to show a few moves, and make them look stylish and pretty enough to dazzle the audience.

A mock battle was challenging for Ye Chong. After all, he never had the talent for pretending.

Duan Qian looked at the two men in the ring with excitement. He had heard about the appearance of a Close Range Combat Master in Su City, but had missed the deadline to be enrolled as Master Ye's student when he arrived in Su City. Besides, rumors were hardly worth trusting.

He knew now that the man was real, and did not want to miss out. Rumors could be lies, but only true Masters could enter the Demonstration Contest. This meant that Master Ye's abilities were convincing enough for His Majesty and the other experts.

Duan Xian felt a mixture of emotions as he watched the young man in the ring, who was only a few years older than him. On the one hand, he now knew that his decision was right - he was not the only one fighting for his path. On the other hand, this young man had qualified to be a Master, and he was awfully jealous of him.

Ye Chong and Xuan Ning would not compete in any special terrain. The ring was only a flat stone-paved stage of a thousand square meters.

Xuan Ning wore no expression on his face. No one knew what he was thinking. Ye Chong was the same. Both men looked serious.

They moved at the same time.

A strong and overpowering parapsychic wave spread out through the entire stadium. It came from Xuan Ning, a super strong parapsychic!

Duan Qian was shocked. Prince Desnio was shocked. All the shooters who were watching went pale. The strong parapsychic wave made them feel like tiny ants at the foot of a mountain, facing tremendous pressure from Xuan Ning's power.

Only Sun Sieha and a few Level 8 shooters could maintain their calm, but their eyes betrayed their emotions. They all knew that Xuan Ning was strong, but this was beyond even their expectations!

Shooters below Level 4 had their parapsychic control damaged by this powerful wave of parapsychic energy. It would hinder their parapsychic training in future, but if they manage to overcome this obstacle, they would reach greater heights than they could ever imagine.

Xuan Ning was as powerful as his reputation suggested!

From the audience seats, Xuan Ning was the size of an ant, but everyone was now feeling afraid of the ant-sized human they were watching. Even some of the Level 8 shooters were studying Xuan Ning with mixed expression.

The strong parapsychic wave from Xuan Ning did not affect Ye Chong too much, since he had an equally strong mind to hold himself against Xuan Ning.

Ye Chong made his move.

"Alright, a performance it is," Ye Chong thought to himself helplessly as he ran across the battle ring.

"Wow! He's fast!"

"By God, is he flying?"

"Mama, look, superman!"

...

The audience grew noisy again. They had never seen such extraordinary skills! Ye Chong could cover seven to eight meters with every step. It was simply unimaginable for the common people, but they were seeing it right now with their very own eyes!

"My God!" Duan Qian's hand went to his chest in utter surprise. He could hardly believe what he was seeing. His eyes were wide open as he followed the figure running in the battle ring.

Ye Chong remembered Sun Sieha's request - be stylish, be dazzling. The truth was, Ye Chong did not have many stylish moves in his book. He had always gone for simplicity and efficiency.

Now he was stumped - how could he create this visual spectacle?

Xuan Ning was also surprised. He had heard of Master Ye's means of combat, but he did not give it much credibility. He was startled by how fast Ye Chong was running right now.

The young man was skilled!

When he saw that Ye Chong did not intend to make a move on him, Xuan Ning knitted his brows and reigned in his parapsychic energy. The audience felt the pressure on them suddenly relieved.

Just when Ye Chong was wondering what would count as a stylish performance, he felt the parapsychic waves around him recede, and then abruptly, had a vague sense of being locked on to.

Ye Chong turned his attention to Xuan Ning. His eyes were cold and emotionless - his first reaction to anything that might become a threat to him.

Xuan Ning's eyes were also directed at him, cold like a snake's.

Ye Chong's upper body vibrated - his entire upper body turned into a blur. That vague sense of being targeted disappeared immediately, and Xuan Ning's eyes widened in surprise.

By now, Ye Chong had forgotten everything about Sun Sieha's request to be stylish and whatnot. All he could see was the battle.

Ye Chong dashed forward like a bolt of black colored lightning, leaving a black zip of afterimages in the audiences' vision.

The opponent was far stronger than Xuan Ning expected. He looked more alarmed as he lifted the fluorescent gun in his hand.

At the same time, an even concentrated parapsychic energy covered the entire battle ring. The audience did not feel it at all. The parapsychic energy coming from Xuan Ning was even more powerful than earlier. The range was smaller, but the energy was more focused, almost thick enough to touch it.

This was the true strength of a Level 8 shooter. They had almost full control of their parapsychic energy, managing the range of their parapsychic waves with great precision. Level 6 shooters could not achieve this. Besides, the strong parapsychic waves were difficult to interfere with.

Ye Chong's eyes narrowed. Dozens of thin blue lines appeared in his vision.

At the same time, Ye Chong's body turned almost fluid - he twisted and turned in seemingly impossible ways, but his moves were smooth, and his steps were quick and unpredictable. It was like watching a fish swimming in water, but it was also a chilling sight to behold.

Xuan Ning was alarmed - he found that he could not lock on to Ye Chong with his parapsychic sense.

If a shooter could not detect their opponent with parapsychic sense, then their defeat was almost certain. Xuan Ning braced himself. Ye Chong was getting very close to him now. That fleeting figure danced menacingly in front of him.

"He's strong!" Xuan Ning thought to himself. However, he would not give up so easily. It was difficult to find such a strong opponent. He would not waste the chance.

He decided to use a technique that he had recently come up with, one that he had not fully mastered yet!

Xuan Ning was a Level 8 shooter. Non-shooters saw him as the most likely candidate in the world to become the next Level 9 shooter. In fact, he was only a hair's breadth away from Level 8, but this infinitesimal step felt so far away. At this level of expertise, things were not so simple. One would either grasp the key to advance further, or not. The gap might take a single day or a decade to cross.

This was a key opportunity for him!

Before 200 thousand spectators, Xuan Ning did the unthinkable.

He closed his eyes.

Just as the fight had escalated, he chose to close his eyes! Was he mad? Some of the shooters in the audience stood up in surprise. Onlooking Level 8 shooters could not help but feel intrigued.

They could decipher more of what was happening in the battle than low level shooters. While the real truth was far from clear, they could see that a moment ago, Xuan Ning was at a disadvantage.

This was a huge surprise to the Level 8 shooters. They never imagined that Ye Chong could threaten a Level 8 shooter! Even the combined strength of a dozen Level 6 shooters could not hope to overcome a Level 8 shooter. Nevertheless, they now waited eagerly for Xuan Ning's next move - what would he do now?

Xuan Ning, the shooter closest to Level 9, was worthy of his reputation. How some Level 8 shooters were stronger than their peers could probably only be truly understood by Level 8 shooters.

Now that Xuan Ning was at a disadvantage, he did something utterly unexpected. What was happening?

The answer was obvious to the Level 8 shooters - this was almost certainly Xuan Ning's new technique!

No one doubted Xuan Ning's talent. In fact, only geniuses can ever hope to reach Level 8. Everyone had different goals in their lives, but it was better to know the limits of one's ability beforehand.

Xuan Ning closed his eyes, and the world around him quieted down.

All the noise around him faded. His parapsychic sense informed him of every detail in his surroundings. In this clear view of the world around him, there was a smudge that he could not lock on to.

A cold and eager smile appeared on his lips.

Ye Chong did not care what his opponent was trying to do. Never fight passively in response to the enemy - that was one of his principles in combat.

However, Ye Chong noticed abruptly that something was wrong.

The dozens of clear blue lines in his vision were disappearing at an alarming rate.

Ye Chong was caught off guard. He had never experienced this before, even with Sha Ya.

The blue lines in Ye Chong's vision were always changing. Sometimes they were gone in the blink of an eye. If he did not make use of these openings, he would be locked on by his opponent.

Ye Chong had no time to figure out his situation. He tried his best to change his form according to the blue lines. The blue lines seemed to come to life - they were changing very quickly, giving Ye Chong less and less time to follow them.

Ye Chong lost his initiative in the battle. He must now follow the blue lines, which were the gaps between the opponent's parapsychic sense. However, the blue lines were getting fewer and fewer. They were disappearing very quickly, giving Ye Chong lesser options and time to fit himself into these openings.

On the other hand, his opponent's parapsychic waves seemed to have transformed. The blue lines in Ye Chong's vision were no longer clear. Instead, they appeared blurred and sketchy, and the lines twisted constantly.

While Ye Chong focused on staying with the blue lines, he suddenly found himself getting further and further away from Xuan Ning.

For the audience, it was an odd sight to behold.

Xuan Ning stood unmoving with his eyes closed. Ye Chong never stopped moving, changing positions quickly. No one could see Xuan Ning's parapsychic waves clearly. They did not know what he was doing. On the other hand, Ye Chong's quick leaping motions and his long steps that reached over half a dozen meters captivated the audience.

Teenagers, especially, thought that the afterimages behind Ye Chong as he moved were simply too cool!

Ye Chong gathered his thoughts. He realized the severity of his situation. If this continued on, he would never get close enough to Xuan Ning. The shooter might not be able to threaten him as well, but that would only result in a stalemate between them.

Ye Chong noticed the rocks that paved the battle ring, and realized his next move.

Ye Chong cried out abruptly - Mortal Roar!

An invisible soundwave rippled quickly outwards from his position.

Mortal Roar was not dangerous for a Level 8 shooter. Ye Chong knew that from his experience with fighting Sha Ya. However, Ye Chong did not intend for his attack to harm Xuan Ning. He only wanted his opponent to feel the vibrations.

Xuan Ning had never encountered this weird soundwave attack before, and was affected by it, as expected.

This tiny disturbance had amplified results in Xuan Ning's parapsychic waves. The number of blue lines in Ye Chong's vision spiked up immediately.

Ye Chong did not hesitate. He was standing at the intersection between two blue lines.

This opening was enough for him!

Ye Chong stomped his right foot heavily into the floor of the battle ring.

Boom! A low booming sound reverberated in the stadium, hammering into the hearts of the audience. Some felt like vomiting in the aftermath.

Something incredibly shocking happened in the battle ring.

Cracks appeared on the rock pavement, beginning from Ye

Chong's right foot and spreading outwards.

Xuan Ning felt the ground shook. He was greatly surprised, and could no longer maintain his calm.

Ye Chong stomped with his right foot again.

The tiny rock fragments on the ground bounced up.

Ye Chong yelled again. He aimed his right leg at a palm-sized rock and kicked.

The rock zipped towards Xuan Ning like a cannonball.

The audience was shocked. Prince Desnio was shocked. Duan Qian was shocked. Even Sun Sieha was shocked!

Xuan Ning was also shocked!

He aimed his laser gun and fired continuously at the rock. The rock was moving quickly, but he could still lock on to it. Nevertheless, his body could not react fast enough to avoid the rock! He could only hope that the rock was destroyed before it reached him!

However, amidst this emergency, he had forgotten something very important. The laser gun in his hand was not his usual weapon of choice - the top of the line Seahorse Eye. Instead, it was only a fluorescent gun used for contests! The fluorescent gun could only penetrate clothing to reach human skin, but it would not do a thing against a rock!

"It's over!" Xuan Ning quickly realized his situation. His heart sank. He could detect the rock clearly with his parapsychic sense. The rock was so fast that it would injure him even at half the speed. If he was hit anywhere vulnerable, he might even die from it!

Where was the rock targeted at? His head, of course!

Ahh!

Xuan Ning's eyes bulged. A thick vein popped up on his temple.

At the brink of life and death, Xuan Ning demonstrated his astonishing potential.

Ye Chong suddenly felt the parapsychic waves around him disappear.

Boom!

The rock exploded three meters away from Xuan Ning, and sprayed a rain of debris outwards.

The entire stadium went quiet.

Xuan Ning stared with bulging eyes for five more seconds, and then fell backwards. He crashed heavily into the ground and fainted.

Ye Chong realized then that he had nearly killed Xuan Ning. This was indirect proof of Xuan Ning's strength. The shooter made Ye Chong feel threatened. Ye Chong did not feel particularly regretful. He looked towards Xuan Sieha and shrugged helplessly.

A stylish performance was too difficult for him!

Sun Sieha was livid. He had almost had his strongest subordinate killed by that guy! D*mn, that idiotic worm, did he not understand that this was just a demonstration contest?

When he saw Ye Chong shrugged at him, Sun Sieha could no longer reign in his anger anymore. He roared at his councilors, "What're you looking at? Where's the doctor? Get a f*cking doctor to check Xuan Ning!" The infuriated Sun Sieha cursed in front of his councilors for the first time ever.

Chapter 550: Puzzled

Ye Chong became a national celebrity overnight because of this battle.

The entire Su City was trembling in excitement! The entire Eastern Cloud country too was trembling in excitement! News of the battle spread like wildfire from the nation's capital to every corner of the world. Western Frost and Northern Lands had already received the news. Other smaller countries would soon follow.

The world was shocked!

Xuan Nin was the creme de la creme of all shooters. Ye Chong's victory over the man cemented his reputation as a Master in Close Range Combat.

Residents of Su City were all excited. Ye Chong's method of combat was strange, but they were all grateful to have witnessed that historic battle! Besides, Ye Chong never imagined what a marvelous experience his battle with Xuan Ning was to the audience. When the battle ended, Ye Chong had already amassed a great deal of followers.

The first ever Master of Close Range Combat in Eastern Cloud, and in the world, had come from Eastern Cloud. This was the pride of every citizen of Eastern Cloud. The people saw Ye Chong as one of the most important people in Eastern Cloud. However, to members from other countries, Ye Chong was a man they respected, feared and hated. A Master in Close Range Combat was not of a particular interest to them. However, some of them, like Mu Shen, quickly found out the worrying news that Ye Chong was accepting a large batch of students.

For now, combat became the most popular choice of occupation, but the other combat schools were only superficial in nature. Only Master Ye's school was considered real combat.

There was no need for advertising. Ye Chong's personal brand was already strong. Young people who missed out on Master Ye's first batch of student intake were now eagerly waiting for the planned second intake.

Compared to Ye Chong's explosive impact, Duan Qian's emergence as one of the Top Eight contestants was only average news. Duan Qian was nicknamed "Young Ye", but he hated the nickname as much as he respected the man himself.

No prodigy would settle for being in placed second.

People in Eastern Cloud began to eagerly participate in combat. That was what Sun Sieha intended all along. Soon after, Sun Sieha announced a series of initiatives to encourage the trend, such as distributing standard combat training manuals written by Ye Chong. The

manual found its way to other countries in no time, and would become the most important piece of literature in the next few centuries.

At the same time, the military announced stricter requirements for recruitment in terms of physical fitness. They also advertised positions for people good in combat with alluring benefits, but no one had answered the ad so far.

A storm was raging in Eastern Cloud. Many events that occurred in this time heralded the beginning of a new era. Shrewd people like Mu Shen would realize that Eastern Cloud was slowly amassing greater and greater power.

Ye Chong did not care. When the demonstration contest ended, he returned to his manor immediately, leaving Duan Qian no opportunity to ask him about studying under him.

When Ye Chong returned to his manor, the first thing he did was call for Sha Ya. Ye Chong asked Sha Ya, "What's Darkniss like?"

Sha Ya took a curious glance at Ye Chong. She did not know why

Ye Chong called her urgently to ask about this. "Darkniss? Why are you suddenly interested in the place?"

Despite asking the question, Sha Ya knew that Ye Chong would not answer her. She paused for a moment, then answered, "Darkniss is a strange and dangerous place. Usually, only shooters at Level 7 or 8 can enter and survive Darkniss. Surrounding Darkniss is the Desert and the Mist.

There is always dust in the air in the Desert. It's a wasteland, where wildlife is rare. However, creatures that call the Desert home are strong. However, as long as you avoid the terrible ones like the sandscorpions, shooters at Level 6 and above should be able to do just fine. The Desert is not too dangerous, but it's impossible to fly in a fighter in there because of unpredictable sandstorms.

After the Desert is the Mist. The place is as humid as the Desert is dry. The Mist is actually a forest, shrouded in very thick purple mist. The foliage is dense. Without strong parapsychic sense, it's better not to enter the Mist, since visibility is too low. There are many wild animals in the Mist. Most of them are insects, the rest are usually small. However, the creatures there usually move in groups. There are also many dangerous plants in the area, making it an overall dangerous place."

Ye Chong asked, "The mist, it's purple?" Sha Ya nodded. "Yes."

Upon seeing Ye Chong going quiet again, Sha Ya continued, "After the Mist, you enter the heart of Darkniss. Darkniss is underground, where the light never shines. You can see red molten lava everywhere in the place, flowing like rivers. Darkniss has no sun, but there are more plants there than even the Desert. I've always found it odd.

"The animals in Darkniss are all very strong. Any slip ups can turn out to be fatal. There are gravstones everywhere in Darkniss. Gravstones are a unique resource found only in Darkniss."

Ye Chong knew that this so-called gravestone was actually metal. They most likely exist in the form of metal ores in Darkniss.

"Shooters who enter Darkniss usually collect gravtones. They are rare materials that can be exchanged for better weapons from weaponsmiths. The amapolla wood you saw last time is also from there. Darkniss is rich with natural resources. Since the geography and environment there is vastly different, the things you find there are also very different from what we usually have out here. Unfortunately, few people can survive Darkniss. The Mist and the Desert that surround the place make Darkniss impenetrable by flight.

Ye Chong suddenly remembered the red-tailed beast sent from Western Frost. He asked, "Have you ever seen a creature with a red arrowhead tail?"

Sha Ya thought back to her experiences, and then shook her head. "No, never. There are too many kinds of lifeforms in Darkniss, and they are all very strong. We try to avoid their territories as much as possible. The creatures in Darkniss always kept to their territories, and will never exceed their boundaries."

"Oh." Ye Chong was intrigued. "They never go beyond their territories?"

Sha Ya nodded. "That's right. It's a strange thing. Ever since Darkniss was discovered, people worry about the creatures escaping the place into our world. You know, there are too many powerful creatures in there. To date, we have recorded more than a few species that are as strong as a Level 8 shooter. Some are even stronger still. No one knows if there are even stronger creatures in there. If these creatures escape to our world, no country will be prepared to defend itself.

"However, from the beginning until now, nothing like that has happened. Oh, now I remember something. There was a sighting of a giant wrapped in gravestone armor in Yedda City. That creature

disappeared soon after it appeared. Duo Ka and his friend were worried about it, but ..." Sha Ya always felt sorry for Duo Ka's group, but since Ye Chong was involved with the deaths of those shooters, she quickly stopped herself from speaking further.

Suddenly, she remembered that Ye Chong was also in Yedda City at the time. She asked, "Didn't you hear about it?"

Of course Ye Chong knew of it. That giant in black armor was Ye Chong's mech, Celest. Ye Chong now understood why he was attacked by Duo Ka when he flew Celest in the forest.

"I did," Ye Chong answered, feeling a little awkward. He quickly focused back on Sha Ya's words. If these territories were real, why did the red-tailed beasts escape the place? Ye Chong would not believe that the vicious red-tailed beasts would obey these territorial boundaries. They were inherently aggressive and prone to expanding their territory. Besides, from the way the red-tailed beasts yearned for pure energy in his own world, it seemed more than odd that the red-tailed beasts would leave this place. The planet had so much energy lying around for them.

However, the fact remained that the red-tailed beasts had never left Darkniss. It was strange.

Since Sha Ya knew nothing about it, Ye Chong found the whole problem shrouded in mystery. The only way he could find answers was to enter Darkniss himself.

Nevertheless, it was a little early to actually visit the place. If even Level 8 shooters had to tread carefully in the place, Ye Chong could imagine how dangerous it was. Without sufficient preparation, Ye Chong would not embark on this journey. He would never put his life at risk so easily.

Since all the mystery originated from Darkniss, Ye Chong had to start planning. The students that he had neglected before now had his full attention. It was impossible to enter the inner parts of Darkniss by himself. If the red-tailed beasts really lived in

Darkniss, he would expect them to move in packs.

Ye Chong was allowed five thousand people for his own security detail. That was what he and Sun Sieha agreed to when they first met. In the more recent agreement where he agreed to help Sun Sieha encourage close combat in Eastern Cloud, Ye Chong had asked to choose them personally. He could also pick them from any of the soldiers in the military, barring high ranking officials and soldiers of the 1st Legion.

Five thousand was enough. He could not afford to pay for more. Despite his wealth, it would still cost him a lot to care for five thousand soldiers. He could hardly expect Sun Sieha to provide him with allowance.

Money was not the most important issue. More important was the fact that all the shooters did not meet his requirements. Ye Chong thought that their midrange combat abilities were not very useful. The fighter aircrafts were also too primitive. Ye Chong did not want to train them into close range mech pilots like him. Long range combat was more advantageous in this world. There was enough energy and suitable raw materials to that end. However, Ye Chong had never seen anyone as physically lacking as these shooters since he left the trash planet.

Their weak bodies could endure flying a fighter aircraft, but not a mech, especially in making sudden turns. Ye Chong would not have this.

Given the circumstances, Ye Chong could only train his soldiers personally. That was why Ye Chong began to pay great attention to their training routine.

Once Ye Chong set his eyes on them, the students suffered. Training became more and more vigorous, in the form of all sorts of training routines that were weird and unheard of. The 20 thousand students suffered like never before. They ran every day till their legs gave way. Their limbs trembled when they ate their

meals.

Ye Chong also prescribed a heavy dose of medication to prevent injuries and strengthen their bodies.

There was a fluorescent green liquid that smelled like vomit. Each student held a cup of this liquid in their hand. They all had weird and suffering expressions stuck on their faces. Even the devil instructor, Liao San, could not help but pity them. He thanked the stars for being assigned as an instructor and not a student!

Gui Gui could empathize with them as well. She tossed a rare look of pity at the female students, who looked about ready to cry, but could not help taking a few steps back. The smell was terrible.

Everyone had their eyes on the platform above, where Master Ye was standing without emotion. The students had been isolated from the outside world throughout their training, but news of Master Ye's victory over Xuan Ning still found its way in here. Ye Chong's reputation skyrocketed to new heights. People worshipped him. Morale was high amongst the students.

This green liquid, though ...

The fluorescent green liquid was still steaming hot, but the nauseating smell was wearing their nerves down.

The first to drink it was Shu Mo'er! She shut her eyes and swallowed everything in her cup in one go.

This surprised everyone, including Ye Chong.

With the first example set, the rest of the students no longer resisted. They chucked the liquid quickly like it was bitter medicine.

The truth was, despite the nauseating smell, the taste was actually not that bad.

The liquid turned out to be very effective. There were fewer

people injured after their medication. From then onwards, the liquid became a daily prescription.

Ye Chong looked downwards at the suntanned young people. Their bodies were much stronger than when they first started, but still far from Ye Chong's ideal. The process cannot be rushed. How many of these 20 thousand people could pass? Ye Chong had no idea. He announced the next student intake to shorten the time between intake rounds.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong was impressed by the military behavior that the students had adopted. This was largely thanks to Liao San, who acted as chief overseer. His actions had influenced the 20 thousand students. Since he was a military man at heart, he had managed the students in a military style.

Liao San thought it was a waste of his talents as a Vice Captain of the Royal Guards to serve as an overseer of the students, but he always executed his duties with complete dedication.

As expected, the students were familiar with the military way of doing things. It was exactly what Ye Chong needed.

Since the celebration and the National Combat Tournament had come to an end, Ye Chong could finally focus on other things. He wanted to modify his manor again. It was too sparsely armed for an actual base of operations.

...

Sun Sieha looked at Xuan Ning, still unconscious, and felt terrible. Xuan Ning was a powerful combatant, but Sun Sieha appreciated the man more for his general capabilities and loyalty. He had groomed the shooter personally to become who he was today. Additionally, Xuan Ning was an honest man with a military air about him. Sun Sieha liked him very much.

How could he be so careless, allowing a crazy person to fight against Xuan Ning? Sun Sieha was vexed. "He's a madman, a

killer!" Sun Sieha cursed Ye Chong repeatedly.

In the end, however, he was the one at fault. Sun Sieha knew exactly what kind of man Ye Chong was. He also knew Xuan Ning just as well. He was too focused on how to elevate Ye Chong's reputation to consider the personalities of these two men.

Xuan Ning was serious, straightforward and ready to kill. Ye Chong was even more serious, more straightforward and more ready to kill!

The clash between them was inevitable!

Sun Sieha was also puzzled about something else - Ye Chong's second student intake. Ye Chong had asked for the intake, and Sun Sieha had agreed to it happily. However, now that he had time to think about it, there was something strange about the whole deal. Ye Chong was not interested in taking students at first. He had to offer quite a few things to get the man to agree to it. Now, however, Ye Chong had asked for another batch of students. Of course Sun Sieha was puzzled!

Sun Sieha could not understand the motive behind Ye Chong's actions.

Chapter 551: Xuan Ning's Visit

Ye Chong had built 62 labor machines. Each labor machine was fitted with a low level bio-photon processor. Ye Chong did not mind the relatively primitive photon processors, since they were easy to make.

Using unidirectional culture methods, Ye Chong could grow large numbers of low level bio-photon processors in a short time. It was the actual labour machines that took time to build. Local wooden materials were as hard as metal alloys, but not as easy to process as metals. There were many minor tweaks that Ye Chong had to manually interfere with. Without this manual part, he would have built 620 machines, and not just 62.

The machines were designed to do laborious physical work, so Ye Chong named them appropriately so. There was now a large heap of earth at the rear courtyard of his manor. Ye Chong had dug 60 meters further down from his laboratory. Kui's chip had information on how to build underground bases, and all the experience they gathered from building the base on Spectre.

This was immensely helpful for Ye Chong. He could have only managed a small underground basement by himself, and not a large underground base.

The base was not complete yet. There were piles of earth everywhere, but the ground was already paved with rock tiles. Ye Chong had used natural materials like rocks to save cost.

Laboratory 1 was done. The flooring was large and there were smooth slabs of rock, with naturally occurring indigo streaks. These rocks were cut with high intensity laser beams. The air circulation system was up. Energy and water supply were settled. Laboratory 1 was 1,600 square meters wide, with a square layout. The space was large enough for Ye Chong to move all the equipment he kept in the buildings topside down here.

After he moved them in, Ye Chong divided Lab 1 into many smaller sections. The lab was small but complete. Ye Chong planned to do all kinds of research work here. He built a few labs that he needed most first. However, it would take five laboratories to store all the equipment he kept in Celest's dimension keystone.

The control station for the entire manor's defense system was also moved underground. The manor was not perfectly secure for now, but it was safe enough. It would be difficult to get him from 60 meters above. The buildings on the ground were only for distraction.

It would be impossible for anyone to break into his underground base, since the surroundings were monitored by a holographic scanning system.

After a few days of intense work, Ye Chong could finally take a breather. Lab 1 was now a fully functioning laboratory. Ye Chong had spent a lot of effort in building his underground base. He did not have specialized equipment for the task, and had to do many things by hand. Ye Chong had no trouble with general construction engineering, but an underground base was usually constructed with many specialized machinery. Ye Chong had never seen or even heard of most of them. He could only build those machines roughly based on their functions. Without Ye Chong's solid foundation of knowledge and rich experience, he would not have been able to build those 62 labor machines.

Finally, he had a relatively safer base of operations. It was the result of hard work. Ye Chong looked at his base that was still under construction, and felt overwhelmed by emotions. It seemed that he had never had a base that he could call his own before this.

However, how long would he be staying here this time?

After spending an entire week in his manor, Ye Chong had to leave. There was still something else that demanded his attention - the Weapons Design Contest. He was to serve on the judge panel.

Before that, however, there was a guest that required his attention.

Xuan Ning's visit took Ye Chong by surprise. Xuan Ning was also the third person, aside from Sun Sieha and Master Karu, to have set foot inside Ye Chong's manor.

If it was anyone else, Ye Chong would have refused to entertain them. Xuan Ning, however, merited his attention.

Xuan Ning looked like a completely different person. Before the battle, he was like a blade that shone threateningly; now, he looked like the image of peace.

Ye Chong took a long glance at Xuan Ning, and asked, "You've reached Level 9?"

Xuan Ning smiled. "Yes. To think that I would reach Level 9 because of you! I thank you for this."

"No need to thank me. It's all because of your own effort." Ye Chong shook his head. He could see that the man's ascension had in part was due to him, but the circumstances were not pleasant. If he was forced to make a breakthrough because someone tried to kill him, saying thank you would hardly be his response.

The first thing Ye Chong would do after achieving his breakthrough would be to kill that b*stard.

The way he saw it, Xuan Ning had no need to thank him.

Xuan Ning did not argue. He laughed and said, "That's up to me to decide."

"Well, you're right." Ye Chong nodded. He was never interested in changing another person's mind. He asked Xuan Ning, "Why are you here?"

"Nothing much. I just felt like coming to see you," Xuan Ning shook his head and said. "I see. You can leave now then." Ye Chong did not mince words with Xuan Ning.

Xuan Ning smiled. "I was just about to leave."

Sha Ya could not understand the exchange between those two men, but news of Xuan Ning's ascension to Level 9 was definitely shocking. If word of this went out, it would definitely cause another wave of excitement. She watched enviously at Xuan Ning's retreating figure with mixed feelings. The first Level 9 shooter in five decades was born. Sha Ya turned her gaze back on herself - a Level 8 shooter, still far from reaching Level 9. When would she ever attain that level of ability?

Ye Chong was also watching Xuan Ning when he suddenly had an idea. He looked to Sha Ya and said, "Come with me. I'll walk you through my battle with Xuan Ning, perhaps you'll get some inspiration from it."

Ye Chong understood Xuan Ning's ability better than most people. He even understood Xuan Ning's final parapsychic attack. The details were worthless to normal people, but they were priceless to Sha Ya.

When Ye Chong was done, he left Sha Ya to her thoughts and headed for the training ground.

Dust was flying everywhere on the training ground. Liao San was yelling; the students were panting heavily; footsteps stomped heavily on the ground. The place was full of activity.

Now that these people had begun to grasp the rhythm of running, they were no longer suffering as much. Some of them picked up certain running strategies and improved their stamina faster. However, this kind of stamina training was limited in purpose. There were other ways to further improve the students.

Soon, Ye Chong would be able to select students with desired qualities from them. A qualified mech pilot must first train their stamina, and then their shooting. Long range mech pilots placed more emphasis on shooting, but Ye Chong was not worried about that part. Eastern Cloud had laws that allow only license holders to

use guns, but really, who had never used one before?

"Take it slow," Ye Chong consoled himself.

Eastern Cloud's Weapons Design Contest was held every four years. The event was not only about weapons design, but also large scale weapons trading. Weaponsmiths with any degree of reputation could sell or auction their more outstanding products in the concurrent Weapons Trading Market. Well-to-do weaponsmiths would prefer to exchange their goods for raw materials that were hard to find.

Shooters would come to barter goods that they had collected over the years, in exchange for some high grade weapons that they had longed for.

As the head of the judging panel, Ye Chong only needed to be present for the finals of the contest. He had plenty of free time on his hands.

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The public square was large. Weaponsmiths put their weapons on display, while shooters laid out all kinds of rare materials. The stalls were packed closely to one another, but everyone looked about ready to burst with excitement.

Ye Chong had his eyes opened by all the weird and interesting things and raw materials on display in the stalls.

The only thing that made him uncomfortable was the fact that everyone recognized him wherever he went. They would rush in to greet him, to curry his favor, or to ask him to accept a new student. Ye Chong could barely stand the enthusiasm and excitement despite his calmness.

Ye Chong found his way out of the crowd, a mean feat by all accounts, and quickly bought a cloak. The gray colored cloak had a mask attached, so that he could hide his face. There were many people dressed in these cloaks, people who did not want to stand

out, like Ye Chong. The outfit did not stand out in the crowd.

Ye Chong had a few laser guns that he made himself on him. Perhaps he could trade them for something good.

He was not interested in weapons. He mostly wandered around stalls that had raw materials on display. Many of them were metals, or gravstones, as the locals called it. Few shooters could survive Darkniss by themselves, but shooters at Level 6 or 7 would form groups to brave the dangers of Darkniss. Their target was almost always the gravstones, unique to Darkniss.

A good weapon was usually not available for cash. Famous weaponsmiths were usually not in need of money. They preferred to barter, and gravstones were popular amongst weaponsmiths.

Ye Chong, on the other hand, was more familiar with metals than any other raw material. Metal ores and minerals did not interest him. In fact, Celest's dimension keystone stored more than a few high grade metal alloy products.

Ye Chong searched around. Suddenly, something in a stall manned by a bearded man caught his eye.

Chapter 552: A Faint Clue

It was a pink coloured colloid object, thick as a brick. Numerous thin blue hair-like protrusions grew from its surface. These blue hair were swaying gently like seaweed underwater.

Ye Chong recalled seeing something like that in the base on Spectre. He did not have time to investigate what it was then, but now was his chance to learn more about it.

The thin hairs on the pink colloid object was some kind of fungus that Ye Chong had never seen before. Having inherited Lunatic Guan's knowledge in alchemy, there were not many fungi species that Ye Chong had never seen before. This blue colored fungus must be extremely rare. Ye Chong knew that Lunatic Guan's chips recorded many species that he had once thought to be rare. The fact this blue fungus was not in the chip told him how scarcely seen it must be.

The universe was vast. It was only inevitable that Lunatic Guan had not seen all the fungi species that ever existed. Ye Chong did not think it odd. The specimen he saw the first time was hidden in a corner, along with many other junk and things, covered in dust. The researchers at the Research Consortium must have not thought much about it. If it was not for the weird shape of the fungus, Ye Chong would have forgotten that he had it in Celest's keystone.

At the moment, he had found another identical specimen in Su City - a pink colored colloid object, on which the fungus grew. If it just the colloid of the fungus alone he was seeing, he would not have been so surprised to see it. This specimen, however, was nearly identical in both parts of the whole. Besides, given how scarce the fungus is, it was most likely that it could only survive under very specific environmental conditions.

How was this new specimen related to the one he found earlier?

Ye Chong studied the bearded man. His hands were covered with thick calluses, the mark of a long history in using guns. Besides, his gaze was steady and confident. Ye Chong put him down as a shooter of at least Level 6.

Ye Chong squeezed his way to the bearded man's stall and picked up the pink colloid. He inspected it closely to make sure that it looked the same as the one he had. It most likely originated from the same place as the specimen he had.

"What is this?" Ye Chong asked.

The bearded man looked up at Ye Chong, and could not glean anything from his form, now covered entirely in a gray cloak. The man shook his head. "I don't know either."

"You don't know?" Ye Chong looked at him, surprised. "Where did you get it from?"

"My father brought it back from Darkniss during one of his trips. He was heavily injured then, and passed away not long after," the bearded man replied quietly.

"Darkniss?" Ye Chong was shocked. He did not expect that. If this fungus came from Darkniss, then where did the specimen he found in the Research Consortium's base come from? Both specimen were obviously the same thing, and came from the same place. Ye Chong was not sure if the fungus was artificially grown or naturally occurring, but if it was really from Darkniss, the odds were that it was a natural form of life in there.

Ye Chong remembered something else. He had arrived in this strange world from the Consortium's base. Could the base be related to this world in some inexplicable way?

The bearded studied the man under the gray cloak, who was now holding the pink colored colloid in his hand and deep in thought. The bearded man felt invigorated. The thing was something he got from his father when he was young. His father died soon after the

trip to Darkniss, and never told him more about the mysterious colloid. Later on, he tried to investigate more about it, but no one had seen it before. After so many years, that strange thing still looked exactly the same as it was the first time he set eyes on it. He no longer felt so intrigued by it anymore.

He was now a Level 7 shooter. He had hoped to get a nifty weapon from this weapons trading market. Ever since he reached Level 7, he had visited Darkniss a few times, but mostly in the outer regions. The Desert and the Mist were not suitable for air travel, so a handy weapon was very important.

In all his years travelling to and from Darkniss, he had amassed some things of value. He brought them all to this weapons trading market in the hopes of exchanging them for a decent laser gun. This man, now, was interested in something he had. However, from the looks of it, he did not know what the pink object was either.

The bearded man's disappointment showed.

"Are you selling this?" Ye Chong asked.

"Only for bartering. I want a laser gun, at least 4 million Lux."

Ye Chong exchanged one of his own handmade laser guns for the colloid object. The bearded man seemed satisfied by the trade. He knew exactly how much the gun was worth. The power of a laser gun at 4 million Lux varied greatly, depending on whether it came from average manufacturers or a Master level weaponsmith. This was why capable shooters would ask for customized weapons from weaponsmiths.

After the trade, Ye Chong saw nothing else of interest. The day's catch was worthwhile, however.

Ye Chong returned to his manor and compared the specimen he found in the Research Consortium's base and the one he just bought. Except for the size and shape, they were exactly the same

thing. Ye Chong made queries from his chip, hoping to find something from the Research Consortium that could tell him where the specimen came from, but to no avail.

First was the red-tailed beasts; then the black circle; now there were two colloid fungi of the same species - one hidden in a corner of the base back in his world, and another from the inner parts of Darkniss. He had also found himself mysteriously transported to this strange and unfamiliar world. All the facts were here. Ye Chong knew that all of them were related in some way, but how? All the signs pointed toward Darkniss.

Perhaps the only way to answer all his questions was to visit Darkniss himself. Ye Chong looked at the holographic scanning, where many young people were training hard on the training ground. He dismissed the idea right away. It was folly to think he could survive a solo trip to Darkniss. These young people he was training were still too far away from being real combatants. Some things cannot be rushed. Nonetheless, what if he only aimed to do a simple exploratory visit?

Ye Chong thought that might just be manageable. Everything he knew about Darkniss came from secondary sources. He cannot make the right decision without having a more objective understanding of the place. Bringing so many people into Darkniss without more information was very risky.

Ye Chong considered the plan. If he were to enter Darkniss himself, that would not do at all. He did not even know how to get there. Sha Ya can act as his guide. She was experienced. However, just the two of them did not seem enough. Perhaps Xuan Ning would be willing to join him? If he offered a good laser gun for the man in exchange for his services, what were the odds of him agreeing to it?

...

For the past few days, Sha Ya spent her time indoors in deep

thought. Ever since Ye Chong shared with her the details of his battle with Xuan Ning, she fell into a mood. Ye Chong understood what was happening. He had been through it before. This was not the time to interrupt her.

Having decided on his plan of action, Ye Chong went to the training ground. He inspected the young people there and found himself happy with their progress. Liao San was training the new recruits with passion. The young recruits all looked sunburnt, with some of them even developing freckles. Nevertheless, they were in high spirits. Even the nobilities looked like they have had a complete personality makeover.

Ye Chong even more surprised by Gui Gui's personally led women's division. The ladies no longer cared for their appearance. They looked exactly like the men. Only the Shu sisters still retained their fair skin. Shu Mo'er threw a cold look at Ye Chong, while Shu Man'er looked haunted and very, very scared. Ye Chong's gaze did not linger on them both. Only their results mattered. He did not mind their hostility towards him.

After briefing the instructors on the latest training routine, Ye Chong returned to Su City. He flew a commonly seen aircraft, the Butterfly-3. It was a popular model which required parapsychic control on its tracking ball to fly it. Ye Chong did not have parapsychic abilities, but flying the aircraft presented no difficulties.

In fact, Ye Chong had thrown out almost all the mechanical parts in the Butterfly-3, leaving only its hull. Ye Chong exchanged the tracker ball for a control lever, similar to the one in the Collision mech. The engine was also modified to fly much faster than the average Butterfly-3. The aircraft was used only for transport. Ye Chong's manor was quite a distance away from Su City.

"You're looking for Xuan Ning?" Sun Sieha was baffled. He stared at Ye Chong, trying to figure him out.

Ye Chong nodded. "Yes." He did now know where Xuan Ning lived, and had to resort to this other option.

Sun Sieha turned to his side and gave the order, "Have Xuan Ning come to my study." A guard immediately rushed out to execute his duties.

Sun Sieha turned back to Ye Chong and studied him for a long moment. He offered slowly, "You really messed things up for me this time, you know? It was just a demonstration contest. Did you know you nearly killed Xuan Ning?"

Ye Chong looked calm. "I've told you before, I only know how to fight."

"Fine." Sun Sieha gestured with a wave. "I'll not pursue the matter further. Xuan Ning has benefited from the accident. A Level 9 shooter, hehe. Eastern Cloud finally has a Level 9 shooter."

Xuan Ning entered Sun Sieha's study then. He saw Ye Chong and could not hide his surprise.

"Your Majesty." Xuan Ning made a proper greeting to Sun Sieha.

Sun Sieha smiled. "How many times have I told you, no need for the formalities. Well, this time it's Master Ye who has come to see you."

"Oh." Xuan Ning looked even more surprised. "What would Master Ye like to discuss with me?"

"I'd like to invite you on a trip to Darkniss."

"Darkniss?" Xuan Ning and Sun Sieha exchanged a look of puzzlement. He Xuan Ning asked, "Why would Master Ye want to visit that place? Are you lacking any raw materials? As far as I know, the Royal Family has all kinds of rare materials in stock. You don't have to risk the trip to Darkniss."

"That's right," Sun Sieha said with a laugh, "We can talk about how much you'd want to buy."

Ye Chong shook his head and made his thoughts clear. "No. Are you willing to go? If yes, what are your conditions?"

Xuan Ning took a long look at Ye Chong. He considered the invitation for a while and then replied slowly, "Accompanying Master Ye on a trip to Darkniss is fine with me. There is no need for compensation, consider it a token of appreciation for assisting me in achieving Level 9. Having said that, I have my formal duties. The trip would require His Majesty's approval." Ye Chong turned his gaze to Sun Sieha.

"Well then!" Sun Sieha affected an expression of unwillingness.

"What do you want?" Ye Chong did not beat around the bush.

Sun Sieha blushed briefly, but quickly returned to business. He considered the question for a moment, and then said, "I'm fine with having Xuan Ning accompanying you. However, in exchange, I want all the information required for us to build your cannon arrays." Ye Chong's cannon array was a powerful weapon, but each one cost the nation 20 million ao, an expenditure that Sun Sieha could not afford. He had long wanted to get his hands on the weapon's schematics, since the weaponsmiths he hired could not replicate the weapon. Now that the opportunity presented itself, he jumped for it without hesitation.

"Alright." Ye Chong's reply was swift. The technology behind the cannon array was not exactly advanced. He had a lot more technical knowledge to offer than that. Offering the cannon array technology in exchange for the assistance of a Level 9 shooter was a good trade.

"Hah!" Sun Sieha was overjoyed. He was prepared to bargain with Ye Chong, but he man had agreed without arguing. Sun Sieha was happy with the outcome, but he could not help but wonder why Ye Chong wanted to visit Darkniss so suddenly.

"I'll come to you when I'm ready," Ye Chong said to Xuan Ning. He then turned to Sun Sieha. "Send your men to my place for the

schematics." With that, he left Sun Sieha's study.

"What do you of his foray into Darkniss?" Sun Sieha asked Xuan Ning.

Xuan Ning could not understand it as well. "I don't know. Master Ye is an mysterious and unpredictable man."

Sun Sieha nodded without a word. In any case, now that he had the schematics for the cannon array, the military would be able to arm themselves with this weapon on a massive scale. Western Frost and Northern Lands would both tremble under the might of the powerful cannon arrays.

"I look forward to that day!" Sun Sieha thought to himself. His eyes lit up fervently.

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When Ye Chong reached his manor, Master Karu arrived right after him.

Master Karu was breathing heavily. "I say, did you forget that you're in the judging panel? Quick, come with me, to the contest, we're all waiting for you. Also, hand me the schematics for the cannon array. I've been trying to figure out ho1 to build the weapon but I can't make head nor tails of it."

Ye Chong remembered that he was supposed to serve as a judge.

Chapter 553: Xi Yan

When Ye Chong and Master Karu arrived at the contest venue, the contestants had already waited close to an hour. No one showed any signs of impatience, however, for they observed a clear delineation of status between them.

Master Karu sighed in relief and said to Ye Chong, "These are the works that made it to the finals. Have a look at them, and rank them as you see fit."

There were five people standing in front of Ye Chong. The youngest was just a teenager, who had an air of youthful stubbornness. The oldest sported a long white beard and sharp eyes. There was a woman among the five. The five of them greeted Ye Chong and Karu respectfully. Standing around them were six other people who also bowed respectfully. They were members the judging panel, and some of Eastern Cloud's best weaponsmiths. Two of them held government positions. These two showed particular admiration for Ye Chong.

Master Karu was in their ranks as well. His was a legendary name in the field of weapons building. Ye Chong's recent appearance was remarkable enough that he had replaced Master Karu as Chief Weaponsmith of Eastern Cloud, putting him on the same level of the other judges. Compared to Master Karu, Ye Chong was had a more mysterious and interesting background.

The Master level weaponsmiths who were now bowing to Ye Chong were curious about him. So far, there no weapons out in the world that bore Ye Chong's name. The two weaponsmiths who were serving the Eastern Cloud government were full of expectations. They looked to Ye Chong like a student would to their teacher. They knew more about Ye Chong than the other four judges.

Ye Chong's works were all treated as classified information by

His Majesty Sun Sieha and Master Karu. It was simply impossible to sell his works openly in the market.

The five contestants were all curious, but also nervous.

Ye Chong turned his attention to the five weapons arranged on the display platform.

The first was a laser gun. Its purple colored body was compactly designed, made from the wood of purple camphor. The weaponsmith behind it must be skilled and experienced to have produced this weapon. The gun had sparse decorations, but it had character behind its minimalism. The entire laser gun was in a dark purple color unique to purple camphor wood that spoke of hidden power within. It was also a very powerful weapon.

The second was a laser sword, rarely seen in Eastern Cloud since there were not many combat experts who used this weapon. The laser sword was 1.7 meters long, with wavy edges like flames. The wavy razors could move quickly like a high speed laser saw, capable of terrifying destruction. The wavy razor operated independent of the main laser sword, but they were both fitted together perfectly. The laser sword held a solid form, and could cut through objects without so much as a flicker. Laser swords were obscure weapons, but this one made the cut to the finals.

The third was an individual photon orb launcher. The launcher looked like a big wooden box, but inside was a scary looking launch barrel. The interesting thing about this weapon was its energy reloading method. Heavy firepower weapons like this consumed energy quickly, making it difficult to maintain a steady stream of attacks in battle. However, this particular photon orb launcher needed only three seconds to reload. Hence, in theory, if a person carried enough energy with them, they could use maintain pressure on the enemy effectively. It was terrifying weapon.

The forth was a set of shurikens. The star-shaped shurikens were elegantly designed and aerodynamically shaped. This was also an

obscure choice of weapons. However, compared to the laser sword, this shurikens set was perfect for shooters, especially those with strong parapsychic sense. The designer of the shurikens had put much thought into the design. He used the tracking ball in conventional aircrafts to control the shurikens. After all, the miniaturization of tracking balls was one of the outstanding issues for weaponsmiths. This weaponsmith had not succeeded in that yet, but he had introduced a new concept. Shooters could have a certain level of control over the shurikens through the tracking ball via parapsychic control. Even though the precision of control was lacking compared to in aircrafts, this was still a remarkable achievement.

The fifth was not a weapon per say, but an engine. It looked quite ordinary, an assembly of colorful mechanical parts and gears that made it look like a patchwork. Master Karu told him that the engine did not draw any attention from the judges at first, but once it was examined with specialized equipment, they found the engine to be shockingly efficient. Nevertheless, none of the judges understood the reason for it, and this made them uneasy.

This was one of the reasons Master Karu insisted Ye Chong to come for the judging session.

Ye Chong quickly ranked the weapons. The engine was no doubt in first place, followed by the shuriken set, the jagged laser sword, the photon orb launcher and finally, the laser gnu.

Everyone waited with deference for Ye Chong to explain the mechanism behind the engine. It was a rare opportunity to hear a Master speak of his field. Even Master Karu looked eager to listen.

"The engine is well designed. Unlike the common design used in this country, the weaponsmith has come up with an original design - I call it the double-U structure. The double-U structure improves energy consumption efficiency, which is why this engine is more efficient than normal engines." Ye Chong pointed at the work that he ranked first. "Besides, the weaponsmith behind this

engine has put much a lot of effort into building it. He used different materials to make different parts. The overall outcome is commendable."

Everyone listened closely to Ye Chong's explanation. But what he said so far was not enough to satisfy the judges, especially people like Master Karu.

Ye Chong did not have the patience to go into the details. He took apart the engine with familiar ease. "The cushioning here is too thick, you should reduce it by a third. Besides, this exhaust pipe is not necessary, take it off. Here, too, you should add a pressure valve." Ye Chong pointed at different parts of the engine and commented casually. He was familiar with the engine's structure, since it was a classic example of the double-U design that he had seen before in his own world. However, this particular engine was only a prototype when compared to the fully developed double-U design in his world. Some small tweaks were in order. However, the weaponsmith behind the engine must be talented to have come up with this original design.

The youngest of the five finalists looked very emotional. Master Karu sighed quietly to himself. Ye Chong was the real thing. His comments were delivered without enthusiasm, but the modifications he recommended showed his true abilities!

Some of the judges looked unconvinced. Ye Chong's explanation of the engine was brief and superficial. Moreover, he had given recommendations after just giving a brief look at the engine. His words sounded more like nonsense.

There was enough equipment provided for the contest to perform those modifications immediately. The young man quickly did the changes as Ye Chong suggested.

When the engine was tested again for performance, everyone was shocked by the results - the engine's efficiency had risen by 20 percent!

Those who doubted Ye Chong earlier now felt only admiration and respect for Ye Chong. Master Karu looked at Ye Chong like the man was a monster - how can a man make a few simple suggestions and produce this staggering result?

Facts are the most convincing form of argument. No one doubted Ye Chong again.

Ye Chong benefited from the experience as well. Aside from the laser gun, the other weapons were all well designed. He was also impressed by the creativity expressed in them. The young man who designed the engine looked similar to Lian Yue. The laser sword felt like a weapon he could wield with ease. Laser swords had one advantage over metal alloy swords - they were lighter and easier to carry. This particular laser sword could extend to 1.7 meters, but when the laser was deactivated, the hilt was only the size of a dagger. Of course, laser swords had the weakness of being dependent on an energy source.

"Is this laser sword for sale? I'm alright with bartering too." Ye Chong asked. In the end, specialization matters. Only a dedicated weaponsmith could produce an excellent weapon like this sword. Ye Chong could not hope to emulate the work. Of all the work presented in the finals, only the laser sword was suitable for Ye Chong. The laser gun was definitely out of question. Ye Chong could build an even better one. The shuriken set required parapsychic abilities. Ye Chong could build an even more advanced grenade launcher than the photon orb launcher. As for the engine, Ye Chong already designed a few engines himself. There were also many engine designs in Kui's memory chips. Only the laser sword was of use to him.

Master Karu was taken aback. Never before had a judge asked to buy a weapon from the finalists. He felt a little awkward, since this might set an undesirable precedent. The request was also unfair for the contestants, since the judges were the ones who decide the winner of the contest.

Master Karu would have declined if it was anyone else, but this was Ye Chong making the request. He could not afford to offend Ye Chong, no matter the reason.

Master Karu looked inquiringly towards the other judges, who were now looking anywhere but at him.

Master Karu rubbed his nose and laughed awkwardly. "That ... That would be ..."

"Is there a problem?" Ye Chong looked at Master Karu.

Master Karu explained hesitantly, "Usually, the works of the finalists will be sold at an open auction at the end of the weapons design contest ..."

"I see." Ye Chong nodded and went quiet.

Master Karu felt unsettled. He threw a nervous glance at Ye Chong. If he offended the man today, how could he hope to live the rest of his life in peace? He knew that this inconspicuous young man had the world's most advanced technology at his fingertips. His Majesty was always trying to pry some of that knowledge out of him.

"I am truly honoured that you are interested in this laser gun!" A middle-aged man stepped forward and said. He was the man behind the laser sword. His name was Xi Yan, age 40. He was not too old for a weaponsmith. Xi Yan looked a little thin. His eyes shone intently against his dark skin.

"According to the rules of the contest, none of these works can be sold before the final results are out. However, the contest did not forbid me from gifting my work to Master Ye Chong. Am I right, Master Karu?" Xi Yan asked suddenly.

Master Karu was surprised by the question, but he nodded in reflex. "A gift, that is not forbidden."

"Then we're all good!" Xi Yan smiled. His next words surprised everyone else. "I willingly present my laser sword as a gift to

Master Ye Chong, and I am pulling myself out from the contest."

"What?" Master Karu and the rest were shocked. Becoming a finalist in the Weapons Design Contest was the highest honour for any weaponsmith. Of course they were surprised by Xi Yan's announcement.

"I only have one request." Before anyone could recover, Xi Yan looked intently at Ye Chong and said, "I hope to become a disciple under Master Ye Chong. I will follow Master Ye Chong for the rest of my life."

This was another bomb for the audience. The other contestants quickly saw the rationale behind his decision. They all saw how capable Ye Chong was.

Everyone in the room looked at Ye Chong. Discipleship was a strict practice, just like in the Five Galaxies.

Ye Chong was surprised by the offer as well. He considered it for a moment, and then replied, "You can study under me, that is not an issue. However, you must be prepared to live a life of constant travelling, unable to return home." "A life of constant travelling" was only a cover. What Ye Chong meant was Xi Yan must be prepared to never return to his home.

Master Karu was shocked. "A life of constant travelling"? His Majesty would never let him go far. He must warn the King about this soon. If Ye Chong fell into another country's hands, the consequences were unbearable.

Xi Yan smiled easily. "Xi Yan has always lived alone. Don't worry, Teacher. From today onwards, Xi Yan will always be by your side." Xi Yan was secretly overjoyed. Unlike other contestants, he did not study formally with any teacher. He was mostly self taught, ever since he was young. Everything he achieved today was the result of his own extraordinary hard work. He had always yearned for a worthy teacher to study under, and now he had found one. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity. He did not care about his ranking in

the contest. He was only a technician at heart. Besides, he was already 40 years old. Who would want to have such an old student?

Ye Chong nodded. "Alright, you'll come with me later." Xi Yan had good fundamentals. With a bit of push, he would improve very quickly.

Xi Yan was not like Kristen. He could follow Ye Chong all the way. A skilled disciple like him would be of tremendous help to Ye Chong. Kristen would stay in Eastern Cloud in the end. She had family and friends here. Even if Ye Chong found his way back to He Yue Galaxy, he would not take her with him.

The other contestants were jealous of Xi Yan. They had teachers already, and besides, they had family that they could not leave behind.

Fate granted him the chance to under a great weaponsmith like Master Ye Chong. No wonder they were jealous of Xi Yan.

Master Karu stared while Xi Yan was being accepted by Ye Chong as a disciple. Anyone would try to hire a talented man like Xi Yan to work for them. Now that Ye Chong had laid claim, no one else could hope to get their hands on Xi Yan again. Even His Majesty tread with care when dealing with Ye Chong. Master Karu did not believe that he would be able to convince any of Ye Chong's disciples to betray him.

"At least he's still in Eastern Cloud," Master Karu consoled himself.

Ye Chong then continued to explain the workings of the other weapons by the finalists. His words were precise and to the point. Everyone was absorbed in them. To them, Master Ye Chong seemed to have a keen sense. He could point out minor changes that could lead to significant improvements. Everyone was impressed by his abilities.

Ye Chong did not care about what his audience was thinking. He only found the designs of these weapons inspiring.

It was a day after all!

After going through all five weapons, Ye Chong took Xi Yan with him and left. The rest of the audience were still entranced by Ye Chong's explanations and miraculous suggestions.

Xi Yan sat behind Ye Chong in his Butterfly-3 as they flew towards Ye Chong's manor.

Xi Yan was intrigued by the Butterfly-3's manual control mechanism. Ye Chong seemed more like invincible than ever. Xi Yan always thought that piloting an aircraft required a licence, and a licence could only be obtained by having parapsychic abilities. A person without parapsychic abilities cannot fly an aircraft. Xi Yan never imagined that a person without parapsychic abilities can fly an aircraft. It was simply unthinkable!

Xi Yan's eyes widened as he watched Ye Chong maneuver the control lever.

Ye Chong noticed his curious stare at the control lever, and offered some explanation, "Mechanical parts allow easier control. I don't have parapsychic abilities, so this modification is necessary."

Xi Yan nodded, not fully understanding him.

The view around them was receding quickly. Xi Yan hesitated for a while, but finally blurted out, "Teacher, this Butterfly-3's engine is modified, right?" The Butterfly-3 was flying much faster than its normal counterparts.

"Yes, but not by a lot. The hull is from the original aircraft. Only the engine, protection system and main body of the aircraft were modified. I've also changed the weapons system." Ye Chong replied casually.

Xi Yan was already in cold sweat. The engine, main body, protection system and weapons system were all modified - how

could he call that "not by a lot"? Those were basically the main components of the aircraft.

"Careful, turbulence ahead." Ye Chong interrupted Xi Yan's thoughts.

Suddenly, the world around Xi Yan started spinning wildly. Everything was spinning in his vision. It made him want to throw up badly.

Ye Chong stared straight ahead, unmoved by the disturbance. His hands pushed the levers here and there.

The Butterfly-3 did a big turn in the air, and then charged forward in a corkscrew motion, drilling its way through the turbulent winds with brute force.

Swish!

The aircraft escaped from the region of turbulence.

The landing field of Ye Chong's manor came into view. Ye Chong pulled the control lever upwards. The aircraft abruptly shot upwards, and then dived straight towards the landing field. Behind him, Xi Yan looked very pale.

When they were barely a hundred meters from the ground, Ye Chong abruptly pulled the control lever up again. The aircraft's nose lifted as it began to level with the ground.

Finally, the aircraft decelerated sharply and landed safely on the landing field.

Xi Yan, now pale as a sheet, supported himself on the hull as he made his way out of the cockpit. When his feet finally touched the ground, he bent over and began to vomit.

Chapter 554: Always Be Prepared

Sha Ya was still isolating herself, thinking about Xuan Ning's battle. Ye Chong arranged for Xi Yan's accommodation without much difficulty. There were many empty buildings at his place after all.

He must start making preparations since Xuan Ning had agreed to the trip.

Ye Chong took out both samples of the colloid fungi. He wanted to find out what was special about them. He assembled all the testing equipment available to him and began to examine both specimens thoroughly.

To his great surprise, all the equipment yielded no results. It was weird!

This was his first time encountering this problem. It was not until the third day that he realized that the fungus could avoid all senses. Electromagnetic wave scans were ineffective against both specimens. Ye Chong had never seen anything with this unique attribute. It felt a little magical. He took Krisen to the samples and made some experiments. As expected, parapsychic waves were ineffective against the two colloid fungus samples.

This was treasure! Ye Chong quickly recognized the importance of this colloid fungus. If he had enough of them, he might be able to derive some form of substance that could help him avoid being locked on by parapsychic waves.

However, two specimens were too little, even for just one mech. Fortunately, Ye Chong was a brilliant alchemist. If he could find a way to cultivate them in large batches, Celest would become a true Kind of Darkness. All forms of detection would be ineffective against the bio-mech.

This shocking discovery was encouraging for Ye Chong. The two

colloid fungus specimens were very useful for him!

Since Laboratory 2 was completed recently, Ye Chong decided to set it up as an alchemist laboratory. He even fitted the lab with its own independent HVAC system [1]. There were even facilities like temperature-controlled rooms and a vacuum sealed room. About half of all the equipment Ye Chong salvaged from the Research Consortium's base was related to biology. With all these advanced equipment, Lab 2 became the most well equipped laboratory in his base.

Fortunately, Ye Chong had the Guan family's auto-analytics mechanism to figure out the best way to cultivate the colloid fungus. It would have taken him years to figure it out himself otherwise. Ye Chong had made a copy of this mechanism. One was with him; the other was with Mu and Shang.

Once again, Ye Chong marveled at the usefulness of the Guan Family's auto-analytics mechanism. He suddenly thought of Lunatic Guan, and felt an emptiness inside him. Some prodigies suffered cruel fates despite their extraordinary gifts, like Lunatic Guan and Gu Shaoze.

Ye Chong tried his best to push away these negative thoughts. He looked up at the photon processor that showed the formula for the colloid fungus' cultivation medium.

Penthorum Ison, Mica-cobalt, Shigaran Zinc ...

Ye Chong frowned. It was a list of metals.

Strange! Ye Chong had never seen a cultivation medium formula like this. According to this recommended formula, the colloid fungus thrived in a metal rich environment. Ye Chong suddenly had an idea - if this colloid fungus really came from Darkniss, perhaps the place was really had an abundance of metals!

The formula seemed to suggest this. However, Ye Chong now had a another dilemma. Metals were easy to find in his own world, he

only needed to pay for them. This world, however, produced no metals. All the obscure metals listed in the formula were impossible to find.

Unless ...

Unless he went to Darkniss. There were some metals amongst all the things that Ye Chong salvaged from the Consortium's base. However, they were only enough to cover half of what was on the list.

Ye Chong's dream to mass produce the colloid fungus would have to wait.

Nevertheless, the discovery had further convinced him of the necessity to visit Darkniss.

Sha Ya was still occupied with her thoughts, and Ye Chong still needed to prepare for his trip. Anyone who knew Darkniss would describe it as a very dangerous place. Ye Chong did not want to lose his life from this trip to Daniss because of lack of preparations on his end.

People have talked that about most of the water in Darkniss was poisoned. Hence, food and water supply was an important issue. On the issue of food, Ye Chong could make nutrition pills. The high energy pills were tiny and easy to carry. As for water, Ye Chong had a few ideas, but none were safe enough. In the end, Ye Chong decided to just bring enough water into Darkniss. It was the safest way.

Ye Chong took some time off to visit the training ground. All the students, be it commoners or nobilities, yielded to the militaristic social structure in the training camp. They improved quickly. Their stamina was much better than before.

Liao San could not quite understand the reason behind all this. He had diligently performed his duties as Ye Chong asked him to, and he had seen the students improve. Their bodies were tougher,

and they were stronger and more resilient. But so what? Even a normal shooter could kill them with a single shot.

What baffled him even more was how their wise King was also very keen in this business.

Ye Chong did not explain himself to Liao San. Instead, he called out the top 200 students who performed the best in stamina and rate of improvement, and then proceeded to teach them a few basic moves. These strange moves were supposed to improve flexibility.

These 200 were the best of the 20 thousand people in the training camp, but the new routine nearly killed them. Three of them quickly suffered from torn muscles, leaving the other 197 of them screaming in pain. The rest of the students in the training ground were appalled.

Ye Chong did not react to the cries of pain and suffering. He stared emotionlessly at them as they performed the new routine from beginning to end. If anyone shied away from the pain, Ye Chong would step up and help them personally with their new moves. This was always followed by a terrifying shriek of pain. As a bystander, Liao San felt his skin creep. He thought Ye Chong would make a good interrogator.

When Ye Chong was satisfied and announced that they had all passed, the students felt immensely relieved. Ye Chong then ordered them to teach those new moves to the rest of the students. After all the suffering they had been through, these 200 people now studied the rest of the students running in the training ground, ready to pass on the experience.

Ye Chong did not spend too much time there. He had much to do. He just received the news that the second student intake was full. There were 50 thousand students in this round! The battle between Ye Chong and Xuan Ning had led to the former's celebrity status. Hence, allocations for the second intake were fully taken up in just two days.

Now, Ye Chong had to build another training ground that could house 50 thousand people as soon as possible.

The 50 thousand new students arrived soon after Ye Chong was finished with building the second training ground. To Ye Chong's surprise, there was one student who was actually skilled in combat - this was Duan Qian.

Duan Qian could not get the chance to meet Ye Chong before this, so he applied for the student intake immediately when he knew about it.

Duan Qian soon caught Ye Chong's attention. Duan Qian had an air about him that was unique to combat experts, and Ye Chong could sense it a mile away. After testing Duan Qian's skills, Ye Chong found himself impressed. It was hard enough to meet anyone good in combat in this world, who could absorb his teaching with ease. Since Duan Qian looked excited, Ye Chong decided to leave the second batch of students to him. He thought that Duan Qian should be able to handle teaching the basics. Besides, Liao San would be there to assist him.

When Ye Chong went to his manor, Xi Yan was there to greet him.

Xi Yan informed him respectfully, "Teacher, the raw materials your ordered for have arrived."

"I see." Ye Chong quickly made his way to the warehouse, with Xi Yan close behind him. Recently, Xi Yan noticed from his interactions with Kristen that his own level of expertise was far below Kristen's. He could not understand many of the things that Kristen had built, and it was baffling and annoying. It was some time earlier that Xi Yan found out Kristen had improved this much after studying under Ye Chong for less than a year. It was invigorating news for him, since it showed how learned and capable his teacher was. Xi Yan felt hopeful for his future.

Ye Chong had ordered some high strength materials this time,

such as wood from the hardy linden tree. This material was commonly used to build aircrafts due to its impressive physical properties. From the volume of Ye Chong's order, Xi Yan could not be certain what they could be for, since they were more than enough to build an aircraft.

Soon, Ye Chong brought out a stack of paper to both his students.

Xi Yan and Kristen exchanged a look of confusion before studying these papers. They were schematics of strange mechanical parts. Details of each part were listed down extensively.

"Can you build these mechanical parts?" Ye Chong asked them both.

Kristen went through the schematics and considered the question. She replied frankly, "Most of them should not be a problem, but some are a bit too complicated for me. I may have some trouble with them."

Ye Chong looked at Xi Yan. Xi Yan remained quiet. He studied the schematics closely, and then shut his eyes in contemplation. After awhile, he opened his eyes again and replied firmly, "No problem. I can make these parts."

Kristen was a little surprised. One could tell from this difference that Kristen lacked the fundamental skills and experience that Xi Yan had.

Ye Chong nodded. "Both of you should stop whatever you're working on now and concentrate on making these parts. I need two of each."

No one would question Ye Chong's order. Besides, these strange mechanical parts had hooked their curiosity. What would the end product be once they finished making these parts?

Ye Chong was a man of surprises. What form of surprise would they be having this time?

The curiosity was enough motivation for them both. They

worked tirelessly to build these mechanical parts. Xi Yan's solid competency in building these mechanical parts impressed Kristen.

After seven days and seven nights, the parts were all done. The empty floor of the warehouse was now scattered with all kinds of parts.

Xi Yan and Kristen both sported bloodshot eyes. They had been working without much sleep in the past few days, but still they kept their eyes open for fear of missing out on any single detail. They wanted to know what the result of their seven days of hard work would be. They could sense that Ye Chong placed heavy importance on this project.

Both Kristen and Xi Yan were competent weaponsmiths. The mechanical parts were built up to Ye Chong's standards. However, Ye Chong did not immediately assemble them together. Instead, he took out a pail of light yellow liquid and used a spray gun to spray the light yellow liquid evenly on the surface of these mechanical parts. Ye Chong had prepared a strengthening solution to improve the physical properties of these parts.

Xi Yan and Kristen studied the spray gun in Ye Chong's hand with interest.

After that, Ye Chong began assembling the parts as his students watched from the side.

Ye Chong did it slowly enough for Xi Yan and Kristen to understand exactly what he was doing.

Slot two linden wood bars together and secure them with mortise and tenon - you get working mechanical arm. Glue 18 curved surfaces together, and you get a pilot cabin the size of a house ...

Xi Yan and Kristen watched with amazement as Ye Chong continued with the assembly. Despite their wildest imaginations, what they were seeing right now was still too much to process.

Ye Chong worked with ease, and began to assemble faster. He

lifted the heavier mechanical parts with one hand, like they weighed nothing at all. His hands could do anything - high pressure hammering, hole puncturing, heavy weight lifting ...

A strange artificial product made of natural raw materials was built.

When it was finally completed, the massive object casted a huge shadow on its observers. Xi Yan and Kristen both watched in quiet astonishment. They had no words to describe what they were feeling right then. Only their eyes revealed how much their worshiped the creator of this miraculous work.

Chapter 555: Spider

It was a huge machine that reached up to almost seven meters. It was shaped like a spider, but with legs that reached up to 10 meters long. The proportion of the main body was larger than that of a normal spider. That was where the pilot cabin was. Eight long mechanical legs supported the pilot cabin body above the ground. Xi Yan and Kristen were completely hidden under the machine's shadow.

An adult human looked so weak and tiny before this gigantic object. Kristen and Xi Yan looked up at the staggering machine that reached up to two storeys tall. They had never seen such a strange machine. This completely overhauled their perception of machinery.

"What ... What is this?" Kristen muttered under her breath, completely taken aback by this machine! Xi Yan had a blank expression that showed how completely surprised he was.

The thing was obviously a machine. Its eight slim but powerful legs could move with great flexibility. There were no decorations of any kind on the machine. All the mechanical parts were in plain sight. The machine was a combination of technology and nature that gave it a quality of strength and power.

"This is only a shell. There are many other things to work on." Ye Chong explained to them both. He was their teacher, and it was only right for him to provide some explanation.

Ye Chong abruptly grabbed onto Kristen and Xi Yan and hopped onto the back of the huge spider. His sudden movement startled the two students, but they soon became preoccupied with their immediate surroundings. They had never seen such a strange and massive machine.

"This is the pilot cabin." Ye Chong lifted a hatch door and gestured inside, then slipped into the cabin. Kristen and Xi Yan

followed.

The pilot cabin was large enough to fit eight people.

"There's still a lot to add onto this machine. There is the engine, and weapons system. Hmm, we should also add extra armor around the crucial parts." Ye Chong stood calmly inside the pilot cabin.

His two students were completely won over by his skills.

"Teacher, this ... What do you call this? Can it move?" Xi Yan asked haltingly.

"A name. Hmm, let's call it Spider." Ye Chong said, "It can walk and move on hilly terrain, but it's a lot slower than an aircraft." In fact, the Spider was probably the first ever mech built entirely of plant materials that mimicked a terrestrial animal.

Kristen and Xi Yan were of course unimpressed by Ye Chong's casual naming for the machine. Such a magnificent being should at least be given an equally impressive name, like Destroyer of Worlds or something.

"What's it used for?" Kristen was curious about this. She had spent more time with Ye Chong than most, and knew that her teacher would not spend so much effort on a useless piece of furniture. Nevertheless, she did think that this huge spider would make an excellent centerpiece.

"Transport for people or resources." Ye Chong provided the explanation after some careful thought. He had designed this huge pilot cabin with the intention of entering Darkniss stocked with enough water and supplies. Ye Chong added, "Hmm, and also for accommodation." The huge spider will of course be properly armed later, but Ye Chong thought that Sha Ya and Xuan Ning would be his main defense line.

Kristen and Xi Yan exchanged a look of disbelief. This magnificent thing was only used for transport, while also doubling

as a mobile outdoors camp. Xi Yan thought it was more than excessive.

In the next few days, Ye Chong continued to improve the Spider.

Engine, holographic scanning system, air circulation system, weapons system ...

The Spider's exterior also received a makeover, since Kristen and Xi Yan thought that the exposed mechanical gears and parts were simply unaesthetic. Hence, they added a layer of armor on the Spider's legs to hide the gears at the joints. This addition made the Spider look even more like the real thing from afar.

Ye Chong also made extensive modifications to some crucial aspects, such as building the entry to the pilot cabin under the Spider's belly. This was because Sha Ya and Xuan Ning were not good climbers. Ye Chong also calibrated the center of gravity of the Spider until he was satisfied that the pilot cabin did not shake too much when the Spider moved on hilly terrain.

It was truly a marvel to see the seven-metre tall Spider run across the mountains. Kristen and Xi Yan were both shocked when they first saw the Spider burst into a run.

Ye Chong left Xi Yan and Kristen with some basic learning material inside a mini projector that could fit into one's hand. This was basically what Ye Chong was teaching them so far. He did not hesitate to share all his knowledge with them. During his time at Aurora, the elders there never shied away from talking about their expertise. They always answered his questions patiently and with great detail. Thus, Ye Chong came to recognize them as necessary qualities in a teacher.

The two students received the mini projectors like it was treasure. They had never seen anything like it. Studying the object brought them no closer to understanding how it worked. They were intrigued by the device, but also captivated by the new and deep knowledge inside it.

...

Sha Ya finally emerged from her room.

Ye Chong gave her a lookover, and then asked, "You're done?"

"Yes." Sha Ya nodded. After so many days of thinking without much rest, her low and hoarse voice now sounded dry and tired as well. "Thank you."

Ye Chong frowned when he noticed how pale Sha Ya was. "You need a good rest." Sha Ya's fatigue was apparent. She looked weak. Her days of contemplation were exhausting.

Sha Ya nodded and returned to her room once more. She knew that she was in bad condition.

After three days of resting, Sha Ya emerged looking sharp and energetic. She agreed readily when asked to accompany Ye Chong to Darkniss.

Xuan Ning received Ye Chong's notice as well, and arrived early at his manor.

When Xuan Ning saw Sha Ya, he remarked in surprise, "You have improved by a lot."

Sha Ya smiled and did not comment further.

Xuan Ning turned to Ye Chong and said, "His Majesty hopes that you will bring a few more people with you. He has a few Level 8 shooters in his service, and suggests that you bring them along. You are, after all, Chief Weaponsmith of Eastern Cloud. If anything were to happen to you, I cannot possibly explain myself to the King." By now, everyone in Su Cit knew how important Ye Chong was to their King, Sun Sieha.

Ye Chong shook his head. "This is only a simple expedition. It would be inconvenient to have too many people. Besides, I have only made preparations for three of us."

"Oh, what sort of preparations?" Xuan Ning was intrigued. What

would a Master weaponsmith do as preparation?

Sha Ya was also curious. Having shut herself in for so long, she did not know what Ye Chong had been up to.

"Come with me." Ye Chong led the two shooters into the warehouse. The shooters exchanged a look, and then followed him.

When the door of the warehouse slid open, Ye Chong could hear both of them inhale sharply behind him.

"What is this thing?" As expected of a Level 9 shooter, Xuan Ning recovered quickly from his surprise. He moved closer to the huge spider and looked up, still in a daze.

"It's called Spider, and it is our main means of transport. The speed is lacking, but otherwise it's quite serviceable." Ye Chong briefly introduced his creation.

Since the two shooters were crucial to his mission, he must let them get familiar with the Spider as soon as possible.

Ye Chong led them to the belly of the Spider. Hiss! A door slipped open, and then a rope ladder was let down.

Ye Chong went up first. The two shooters quickly followed him up the rope ladder.

The pilot cabin was no longer empty. There were now three chairs that could spin freely, with six huge screens that covered 180 degrees of vision. Each chair came with a firearms control lever for shooting. The seat at the center had a control panel. That was Ye Chong's seat.

The wall of the pilot cabin was lined with a thick layer of bushy lilac colored plant. It could produce enough oxygen for three people.

At the rear were two big rooms that function as storage space. This would be where they store drinking water and energy

crystals, and even some repair tools and extra parts.

When Ye Chong began to demonstrate how to pilot the Spider to run around the manor, both Xuan Ning and Sha Ya had already fallen in love with the machine.

"Can you build one for me? Just name the price." Xuan Ning asked hesitantly. The machine was awesome, it was practically a moving castle. Besides, the huge storage space could carry plenty of water and food. It was very useful for shooters who liked to explore the wilderness. Moreover, the machine could move very quickly even on hilly terrain. Xuan Ning would very much like to own a Spider.

Sha Ya was quiet, but her keen eyes betrayed a similar interest.

Ye Chong looked at them. "After we come back from Darkniss, I'll build one for each of you." As long as Xi Yan and Kristen prepared the gears and parts beforehand, the actual construction would not take too much of his time.

"Oh, wonderful!" Xuan Ning was overjoyed. Sha Ya caressed the firearms control lever like a lover.

"Shall we leave now?" Xuan Ning lost all his composure as a Level 9 shooter. He was like a child eager to try out his latest toy.

"Wait. We still need to bring these." Ye Chong pointed at a huge pile of supplies in a corner of the warehouse.

These were the supplies they had to bring with them for this expedition. Ye Chong made full preparations for his trip to Darkniss.

With all three of them working, the supplies disappeared onboard quickly. It helped that Ye Chong was practically a weightlifting machine.

Sha Ya pointed at a box, filled with bottles of liquid. "What are these?"

Ye Chong threw a quick glance at them. "Testing solutions." From the blank looks he got from the shooters, Ye Chong knew that explaining to them would be a hassle. He said, "You'll find out soon enough." He then continued with moving the box onto the Spider.

Soon, everything was moved onto the Spider. The storage rooms were now packed.

Xuan Ning looked at the packed storage rooms and commented, "That's enough to last us for months. If only I have one of these long ago, I would have explored every corner of Darkniss by now."

Sha Ya was quiet throughout, occupied with her thoughts.

Of course, Ye Chong was not planning on piloting the Spider from his manor. They were still some distance away from Dual Forest. At the speed the Spider was moving, it would take them God knew how long to reach Darkniss.

Ye Chong called Liao San and asked for a transport aircraft. The transport aircraft, nicknamed Big Mushroom, could manage a heavy load. A Spider was no trouble for it at all.

When the transport aircraft docked in Yedda City's landing field, it attracted a lot of attention. The transport aircraft was of an expensive model. Only selected elite military troops would have them. Besides, the symbol of the Royal Guards on the aircraft was simply eye-catching.

The Spider, carrying Ye Chong and the two shooters, emerged into the open from the transport aircraft.

This ignited a commotion in Yedda City's landing field. "Heavens, what is that monster?" The huge spider ignored the onlookers and left.

The landing field was situated outside Yedda City, so Ye Chong and his crew did not have to go through Yedda City itself to enter Dual Forest.

It was common for shooters looking for an adventure to hang around in the outskirts of Dual Forest. The sudden appearance of this massive thing was shocking. Fortunately, the mechanical nature of the Spider was easily recognized. Once the shooters realized that it was man made, they did not feel so frightened anymore. Some of the bolder shooters even trailed behind the machine out of curiosity.

Dual Forest was largely made up of gigantic trees. These trees had a thick canopy that blocked most of the sunlight to the ground. Trees below the canopy were stunted and weak from the lack of sunlight. This was the law of nature. The strong grew stronger by commanding most of the resources; the weak turned weaker, with no hope of ever absorbing enough sunlight to become just as gigantic, not unless the huge trees around it fell and give way.

The forest did not hinder the Spider's advance. It weaved its way easily through the scattered trees on the forest floor. The weaker trees were simply bulldozed over. The shooters who followed the Spider were jealous of the pilot behind the machine. How nice it would be to own a Spider too.

Xuan Ning and Sha Ya could tell that Ye Chong was experienced in controlling this kind of machine.

They were full of anticipation for their expedition to Darkniss.

Chapter 556: The Amazing Spider

The wild animals in Dual Forest were all scared away by the gigantic newcomer. In the end, Ye Chong and his crew crossed Dual Forest without being challenged by any of the native creatures. Xuan Ning felt annoyed, for he had just learned how to maneuver the Spider's weapons system.

The shooters who were following the Spider suddenly found themselves travelling all the way across Dual Forest. Most of them had never ventured deep into Dual Forest, for the place was home to many vicious animals. It was simply too dangerous for them! Now that they had actually crossed the entire Dual Forest, all the shooters felt excited. They had all run with all they got just to keep up with the Spider in the past few days. The weaker shooters were left behind long ago.

Xuan Ning frowned, "What's with their foolishness? Staying alive is more important than satisfying their curiosity."

Ye Chong and Sha Ya understood him. The shooters were able to reach so far inside here because of their Spider, and not their own strength. Once they were no longer under the protection of their Spider, the dangers of the place would surely overwhelm them.

Ye Chong and his team did not have time to care for their survival. These shooters must now make their way back to Yedda City by crossing the entire Dual Forest again. Xuan Ning and Sha Ya both knew that only shooters of at least Level 6 could survive the journey. Of all the shooters following behind them, only a few were that skilled.

Xuan Ning saw Ye Chong's eyes lingered on him. He said to Ye Chong, "Forget about them. We should be on our way. Shooters who cannot think calmly are foolish. We're not their babysitter."

Sha Ya threw a pitiful glance at the low level shooters. They had realized the situation they were in now, and had started to panic.

The three of them did not stay behind to help. They would not delay their expedition because of these shooters.

Without the Spider, crossing the entire Dual Forest would take around 20 days. Even capable shooters like Xuan Ning and Sha Ya would take that long. This was because the only way to travel was by foot. Besides, in order to avoid the territories of the vicious native animals, they had to make detours and risk losing their way.

On the other hand, Ye Chong and his team sat inside the Spider's pilot cabin, enjoying their drinks and sporadic conversation while the Spider made its way through Dual Forest. It took only five days to complete the journey. Along the way, the Spider stormed through anything in its path. Xuan Ning was astounded by the sight of all the animals that practically leaped out of their way. Once, the Spider unknowingly crashed into the home of a flock of sharpbeak cuckoos. Over a hundred sharpbeak cuckoos scattered to the skies, making for an impressive spectacle.

Even the larger animals were cautious around the huge spider, for they had never seen it before. They stayed back and did not initiate any contact. Hence, the Spider carried its three passengers and led the group of low level shooters behind it across the entire Dual Forest.

Once they exited Dual Forest, the environment around them transformed quickly.

There was less foliage. The air was dryer. The ground composition turned sandy.

On the third day after leaving Dual Forest, there was not a tree in sight. The ground was flat. The wind bellowed. There were no plants, no humans, no animals - it was a wasteland. This was the Desert.

The wind grew stronger and stronger, kicking up tiny rocks that hit on the Spider. Cling! Clang! The graveled terrain was a picture of desolation. The uninteresting surrounding was uninspiring.

Nevertheless, Xuan Ning was sitting up straight and looked serious. "I think a sandstorm is coming."

Beside him, Sha Ya shared the same thought. "Agreed."

Ye Chong heard them. He focused on the holographic screen and keyed in a series of commands. Xuan Ning approached him and asked curiously, "What are you doing?"

"Releasing the Hummingbirds." Ye Chong answered without looking up.

"Hummingbirds? What are they?" Xuan Ning thought he was just like some curious child who could not help asking questions.

Ye Chong continued keying in the commands. "Hummingbirds are small surveillance devices that can increase surveillance coverage area."

"I see."

Four Hummingbirds were released from the Spider into the outside world. They headed straight for the skies.

The Hummingbirds transmitted their video feed onto the screens. Despite the strong wind, the Hummingbirds maintained steady flight and provided clear images of their surroundings.

"D*mn it!" Sha Ya and Xuan Ning cursed simultaneously.

On the screen, the sky had darkened some distance away from them. The sandstorm cast a dark shadow on the ground. The most dangerous thing in the Desert was not the large army of sandscorpions or the vicious sandlizards, but the natural phenomenon known as the sandstorm. Strong winds could lift huge rocks into the air. If hit by any of them, the result would be nothing short of a swift death.

Even if someone could avoid being smashed by huge rocks, they would not be able to avoid the sand flying all around them. If unlucky, they would find themselves buried deep under tons of

sand, something not uncommon in the Desert.

Ye Chong and his team had not even reached the heart of the Desert when this sandstorm hit them. They were most unfortunate.

Just then, the video feed shook. Ye Chong quickly ordered the Hummingbirds to return, but by then he had already lost one Hummingbird to the sandstorm.

There was only one thing left to do now.

The huge spider raced across the empty desert wasteland, with a massive sandstorm close on its tail.

The Spider was not fast, and the sandstorm caught up quickly. Its passengers were now witness to a powerful force of Nature.

Bam bam bam! Rocks and pebbles rained down on the Spider's armor. Larger rocks would shake the pilot cabin. Not even a Level 9 shooter can survive the sandstorm. Xuan Ning felt unsettled by this realization.

"It's d*mn lucky that I didn't encounter a sandstorm last time. F*ck, no one can survive this." Xuan Ning could not help cursing. Ever since he reached Level 9, his personality had undergone a 180 degree change. He lost his rigidity and became more open and easygoing. Once upon a time, he would never have cursed openly like this. Ye Chong thought the behavior change was curious. None of the mentalist principles that Huang Baiyi had taught him said anything about personality changes.

Sha Ya looked nervous. "Yes, I was quite lucky too the few times I've been here. I never encountered a sandstorm before. It's highly unlikely for anyone to live through this."

The pilot cabin was hit again, and shook violently. Xuan Ning was nearly sent flying from his half lying position. He put his hands to his stomach and gritted his teeth, enduring the pain.

The screen informed them that the Spider was hit by a rock of

over half a meter in diameter. Xuan Ning looked even more unsettled.

Ye Chong was expressionless. "The wind is too strong. We have to stay put and wait for the storm to pass."

"It's our only option." Xuan Ning and Sha Ya exchanged a look of helplessness. The Spider was shaking violently from the buffeting of the winds. Large rocks would hit them intermittently. It was impossible to travel in this condition.

Ye Chong keyed in a series of commands in the control console. Xuan Ning looked curiously at Ye Chong at the control console. Everytime Ye Chong did something at the controls, the Spider was bound to respond in some way. Xuan Ning thought that the Spider was full of surprises, just like its creator.

Whrrr! A laser gun was activated outside the Spider. It fired eight times on the ground, leaving eight deep holes. The holes were arranged in two rows of four. Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were still trying to figure them out when the Spider stepped its legs into the holes. The Spider's body lowered as a result. The pilot cabin was lowered to the ground. The Spider's legs now had a tight grip on the ground. The holes were just deep enough for the joints of the legs to bend at the surface of the ground.

Creak creak creak! A grappling clamp came out from each of the leg's joints and sunk itself into the ground.

Suddenly, the pilot cabin stopped shaking. Despite the rocks raining down on the Spider, the pilot cabin did not move at all. The three passengers felt none of the violent shaking anymore.

"So you can do this too! This is neat!" Xuan Ning praised. The thought of Ye Chong giving him a Spider after they returned from Darkniss sent a jolt of euphoria through him.

"Sleep." Ye Chong did not care to indulge him. He switched off the lights in the pilot cabin, and all of a sudden they were shrouded

into darkness.

Xuan Ning exclaimed in annoyance. "Why'd you turn off the lights? It's so dark."

Sha Ya was not used to being in the dark with someone else, much less with two men.

Just when she was about to speak up, Ye Chong's answer silenced her. "It's to conserve energy."

Xuan Ning complained, "Conserve energy? How much energy can you save like this?"

Ye Chong ignored him, and Xuan Ning soon quieted down.

The pilot cabin was dark and quiet. Its passengers were most likely asleep now.

The storm continued for a full day before it subsided. By then, the Spider was mostly buried under the sand, leaving only a small part of its back exposed. Even so, there was a thin layer of sand on its back.

Fortunately, Ye Chong had fitted a powerful engine for the Spider, or it would have been impossible for them to climb out of the sand. The Spider lifted its body, and all the sand was shaken off.

The Spider began to walk. There was a disc of about 1.5 meters in diameter at the end of each leg to prevent the machine from sinking into the sand.

With the help of these eight discs, the Spider moved quickly across the sandy terrain. The sandy mounds did not slow the machine down.

"Ohh, this is amazing!" Xuan Ning exclaimed in excitement. "Haha, when I get myself one of these, I am coming to Darkniss every year for vacation. This is so much fun!"

Ye Chong focused on the screen in front of him. He ignored Xuan

Ning completely as he piloted the Spider on its way forward.

When the Spider reached the peak of a 100-meter tall sand dune, it brought its eight legs to the center and linked all the discs at its feet together to form a huge board. The Spider then glided down the dune on the board.

Sha Ya and Xuan Ning had never seen anything quite so interesting. The Spider was like a toy for them. Xuan Ning was jumping up and down like a little boy. On the contrary, Sha Ya's composure was more like a Level 9 shooter's.

The Spider travelled more easily and quickly on the sand dunes.

"If we follow this direction at our current speed, we will leave the Desert after roughly three days." Xuan Ning pointed to the front and said to Ye Chong. He still looked energetic, with a seemingly unlimited capacity for excitement. Sha Ya, on the other hand, was already over the initial phase of excitement.

Their luck seemed to have turned for the better after the sandstorm. Aside from the two sandlizards that had immediately took off after being surprised by their transport, they had encountered no other wild animals. Three more days, and they will be out of the Desert.

The Desert was a strange place, interspersed with drought regions and sandy regions. In the past few days, they had already crossed a few of them.

It was all sand and rocks, but Ye Chong still noticed the subtler details. The deeper they went, the more metal ores there were in the drought regions. He could see these metal ores now at their location. The ores were mostly soft and tiny. The sand was more fine as they went deeper into the Desert.

Ye Chong had the Hummingbirds outside throughout their journey. The holographic scanning system was disrupted, and could not provide enough scanning range and detail. Ye Chong had

no other combat mode holographic scanning system aside from the ones on Celest and Moon King, but he did not want to use his mechs. Fortunately, the Hummingbirds provided him with some improvement in holographic scanning results.

However, they were soon running out of luck. According to the live feed from the Hummingbirds right now, there was a sea of sandscorpions in front, advancing towards them like a swathe of dark clouds.

Chapter 557: Carmic

Sandscorpion colonies were a deadly threat in the Desert, just like the sandstorm. A colony of sandscorpions could stretch out for miles, and they moved at an astonishing speed. An encounter with a scorpion colony would be pretty much like signing your own death warrant. A sandscorpion was about the size of a human fist. Just a drop of venom from the tip of its tail would be fatal. Besides, the sandscorpion could release a highly corrosive poison from its tail.

Sandscorpions always appear in the thousands. They could move much faster than a normal human. Shooters who encountered a sandscorpion colony never make it out alive. There was no way to deal with so many sandscorpions.

Xuan Ning looked troubled. "We're really down in luck. First it was all peaceful but now look what we've got in our hands."

Sha Ya had already made her decision. She turned to Ye Chong and said, "We should run from them."

Every field of expertise has its advantages and disadvantages. A close range fighter like Ye Chong would be able to outrun the sandscorpions. Any capable combat expert would be able to run for at least a few days non-stop. Shooters, however, could not do this. Their weak bodies could not carry them fast enough away from the sandscorpions. Besides, sandscorpions were known to be tenacious in pursuing their prey, making it difficult for anyone they had set their sights on.

Even a Level 9 shooter like Xuan Ning would not be able to handle the sandscorpions.

The Spider was not fast, but it was still faster than the scorpions. Nevertheless, if they ran for it, their schedule would be interrupted. The disgusting insects were famous for their tenacity.

Ye Chong did not bring the Spider to a run. Instead, he went to the storage room and disappeared inside.

The sandscorpions had discovered the huge spider by then. The Spider presented itself as a feast for the sandscorpions. It was terrifying to see the huge colony of insects marching towards the Spider. Xuan Ning and Sha Ya both look stricken.

"Are you trying to test the Spider's anti-corrosive properties?" Xuan Ning looked deeply unsettled.

Sha Ya had already reached for her laser gun. The feel of the weapon gave her a sense of security. She watched the approaching sandscorpions on the screen nervously.

Both shooters did not know how to pilot the Scorpion, or they would have had the Spider running by now.

They did not know what Ye Chong was up to. It was not Ye Chong's nature to give up so easily, but they could not fathom what he could do given their current situation.

No sound came from the storage room after Ye Chong disappeared inside it.

10 minutes passed.

Finally, Ye Chong came out from the storage room with two test tubes. The first test tube was filled with a green coloured solution, while the other was filled with a light yellow solution. The solutions were clear as crystal and sparkled under the light.

Xuan Ning forgot about the sandscorpions for a moment and stared wide-eyed at the solutions. "What are these?" Sha Ya was also looking at the two beautiful test tubes with great interest. Women seemed to be innately drawn to pretty glowing things.

"Shavill root extract and Wanda extract." Ye Chong offered two technical terms that were foreign to both Sha Ya and Xuan Ning, but he did not elaborate further.

Ye Chong directed his attention to the screen. While he was inside the storage room just then, the sandscorpions had already gotten very close to them.

The insects were at most 500 meters away. This was a difficult situation for anyone to be in. When Xuan Ning looked at the screen again, he was shocked by what he saw. "Run! Run -"

Even Ye Chong was surprised by Xuan Ning's loud shriek. Who knew that a Level 9 shooter could be shocked to this extent. Sha Ya could not help rolling her eyes. She felt her cheeks turn red out of embarrassment. How could Eastern Cloud's number one shooter turn out like this? His name was enough to tame even the most arrogant and powerful shooters of their time! As a professional in the same field, Sha Ya thought he was an embarrassment.

Crack! Ye Chong planted a chop from behind Xuan Ning's neck. The man's eyes rolled upwards as he slumped quietly to the ground.

Sha Ya gaped in bewilderment at Ye Chong. How could anyone treat a Level 9 shooter like that? She could hardly believe what she saw.

"He's too noisy," Ye Chong explained calmly.

Sha Ya threw a sympathetic look at Xuan Ning, but blurted out, "How long will he be out? Should we give him a tranquilizer? It's safer that way."

Ye Chong held the two test tubes in his left hand while his right hand flew across the control panel, keying in commands.

The Spider began to retreat backwards. The soft footing beneath it did not affect its movements. They began to distant from the sandscorpions. However, the colony was too big to escape so easily.

Sha Ya could not understand him. If he wanted to escape, why wait until now? Was it not a little too late now? And what were the liquids in the two test tubes for?

Suddenly, Ye Chong opened the firing chamber, where a cone shaped grenade with four tail fins slid out.

Sha Ya had never seen a grenade before. Aircrafts usually use photon grenades, powerful pure energy weapons that ran on energy crystals. She had never seen a solid weapon like this.

Nevertheless, it felt natural to see something unfamiliar whenever Ye Chong was involved, especially weapons. After all, he was the Chief Weaponsmith.

Ye Chong put down the two test tubes in his left hand and took the grenade instead. He had made preparations for their expedition. He knew that pure energy weapons were only suitable for a narrow range of situations. Besides, these creatures had outer shells that were very resistant to energy base attacks. Other weapons like corrosion grenades and high compression explosive grenades were more up to task. Ye Chong had a thing for auxiliary grenades. He was a wide variety of experience in putting them to good use.

For this reason, Ye Chong prepared all kinds of grenades for this expedition. He had space to store them. Right now, he was using a high explosive grenade, fitted with a miniature engine at its tip. Without using any tools and with the other hand controlling the Spider, Ye Chong opened the bottom part of the high explosive grenade.

Sha Ya simply stared. She had never seen a human hand move so deftly!

Besides, she was curious as to what Ye Chong was about to do.

Ye Chong removed the explosives inside the grenade and replaced them with the solutions in the two test tubes. He then secured the casing at the bottom of the grenade very carefully, leaving the Spider's control panel while he focused on this task.

Sha Ya had never seen Ye Chong move with such deliberate care.

She held her breath while Ye Chong worked.

Ye Chong lifted the grenade carefully in his hands and sent it sliding back down the firing chamber.

When the hatch of the firing chamber was closed, Ye Chong felt relaxed. Sha Ya could hear his breathing pace change. It took only a short while to modify the grenade, but Ye Chong was already sweating on his forehead.

Sha Ya knew the kind of person Ye Chong was. He did not panic even when fighting against a Level 8 shooter by himself. However, he was clearly nervous when handling those two test tubes. What could be so terrifying about the beautiful solutions in those test tubes?

Ye Chong ignored the sweat on his forehead and resumed typing on the control console.

"Target identification." A red cross appeared on the screen. Ye Chong moved the red cross to the center of the sandscorpion colony.

"Target locked."

Next, Sha Ya heard a low rumble from the firing chamber that Ye Chong opened earlier. She saw Ye Chong focusing on the screen, and followed suit.

There was an almost imperceptible flash at the center of the red cross. Sha Ya noticed the tiny flash of light on the screen.

"This must be the strange 'weapon' that Ye Chong slid down the firing chamber," Sha Ya thought to herself. She watched the screen with anticipation.

Abruptly, a cloud of yellowish green smoke exploded in the center of the sandscorpion colony.

The thick smoke spread out quickly from the center. Sha Ya was surprised by how fast the smoke was spreading.

When Ye Chong saw the smoke, he immediately had the Spider retreat at full speed. The Spider jolted backwards.

In the next instant, the yellowish green smoke had engulfed all the sandscorpions. The Spider could not outrun the mist. Ye Chong immediately keyed in new commands for the Spider.

"Close all ventilation openings. Activate cabin oxygenation system. Pressurize the cabin."

The Spider stood still as the mist finally reached it. The Hummingbirds were still in the sky, however, and the video feed from them informed them of what was happening outside.

The thick yellowish green mist unfurled on the ground like a monster, spreading at an alarming speed.

Both the Spider and the sandscorpion colony found themselves shrouded by the thick mist. It was impossible to see them from the sky, outside the mist.

Sha Ya was confused, but began to have an inkling of what was to come.

She stole a glance at Ye Chong. The man looked serious as he looked at the screen without a word.

Gradually, the mist began to subside. Xuan Ning awoke then. He rubbed the back of his neck and sighed. "Oh my, what's with the soreness? Huh, there's a mist?" Xuan Ning was startled by the image on the screen. He straightened up immediately. "Impossible. There is no mist in the Desert. Why is there a mist? And it's in a yellowish green color!"

He turned to the other two people in the pilot cabin in surprise. "Did someone fart?" Ye Chong and Sha Ya simply ignored him while he wallowed in embarrassment.

The mist was thinning out. Ye Chong was happy to find that the mist was behaving as he expected.

The mist subsided as quickly as it first appeared. Soon, it was gone without a trace.

"Wah!" Sha Ya looked terrible. Her eyes betrayed the shock she was feeling. She doubled over and vomited.

Xuan Ning looked pale. He watched the screen in horror and muttered, "This, this is impossible ..."

All round them was a five-kilometer radius of blood and dissolved flesh. Nothing in sight was left alive. The sand was covered with mushy insect bodies. The blood was quickly absorbed into the sand beneath it, forming a layer of dark red crust on the ground. Above the layer of crust lay hundreds and thousands of sandscorpion exoskeletons. Only the toughest parts of the exoskeletons remained, which was the sting on their tails!

Sha Ya threw up violently. Despite her long experience in combat, she had never seen or heard anything quite so bloody and devastating. The pilot cabin was filled with the stench of vomit.

Ye Chong was unaffected by it. He tapped a few times on the controls and the air inside the cabin was freshened up. The vomit was cleaned up by an automatic cleaning machine.

Sha Ya straightened up, her face white as a sheet. She stared at Ye Chong in horror.

Sha Ya felt a deep terror inside her. The man in front of her was like the Devil in all the legends she had heard of! No, he was even scarier than that! If this "weapon" was used on humans ... Sha Ya felt goosebumps all over her. She seemed to understand now why Ye Chong had nothing to be afraid of, not even a Level 9 shooter. After all, what was a shooter compared to this?

It was a terrifying thought!

Xuan Ning was uncharacteristically quiet, but his sharp eyes revealed how shaken he felt!

If this weapon was ever used on Su City ...

A flash of killing intent came and went from Xuan Ning.

Ye Chong ignored the horror of his two companions. Personally, he thought that this fell short compared to the time when he used the Green Tempest. This time around, he did not have the materials to formulate the Green Tempest. Besides, the wind conditions and humidity in the Desert were not suitable. Hence, he opted for the Shavill root extract and Wanda extract. When mixed together, these two solutions produced a very poisonous and corrosive gas called Carmic, which meant "to dissolve". [1]

Even so, Ye Chong had used this combination with great care, since both solutions were highly unstable and very dangerous to handle.

Fortunately, the weapon worked perfectly. For a person like Ye Chong, who cared only about results, it did not matter if he ended up with a disgusting and bloody scene.

Chapter 558: Crossing the Mist

After solving the problem of the sandscorpions, the trio did not encounter any other creatures along their journey in the Desert. Xuan Ning no longer felt lively. Sha Ya looked pale, perhaps from all the vomiting. Ye Chong could tell that Sha Ya was afraid of him. It was not the first time people looked at him this way. Every time he used alchemy, people would be afraid of him. He was used to it already.

Ye Chong never minded the silence around him. Sha Ya and Xuan Ning thought the Desert was an uninteresting wasteland, but Ye Chong could study his surroundings with great detail and undivided attention.

They must be arriving in the last drought region of their journey. Some of the rocks on the ground would sparkle with a metallic luster. There were more metal ores here. Ye Chong could see that most of them were low quality metal ores. Unless he had access to good extraction technologies, the ores would be useless to him.

There was a trend here that he had observed - the further in they went, the more metals there were around them.

"Beyond this ridge is the Mist," said Xuan Ning. Three days had gone past, and the shooter had now recovered himself from the shock.

This was a huge white-colored rocky structure. It was not tall, and had white jagged edges all over its bald surface. It looked more like a small hill of about 300 meters tall than an actual mountain ridge. The structure extended for a very long distance like a natural barrier. Huge rocks were randomly stacked next to each other, forming this ridge structure. Many parts of the ridge were unsuitable for climbing.

Of course, to Xuan Ning and Sha Ya, the mountain barely reached 300 meters; to Ye Chong, it was only a small hill.

Under Ye Chong's command, the Spider made its way quickly towards the hill.

The Spider's eight legs allowed it to move across the uneven terrain easily. Obstacles that were impossible for humans to cross were easily leaped over by the Spider.

Xuan Ning could not help but felt emotional. "Machines are so powerful. This Spider must be more valuable than 10 Level 8 shooters. I wonder, were the decades that I spent in honing my parapsychic abilities all in vain? If I used all that time to study engineering, what would the outcome be instead?"

Sha Ya looked at Xuan Ning, shaken by his words. She found it hard to believe that a Level 9 shooter would say those words. Shooters were mentally tough and determined people. This was why they were stronger than common people. However, the first Level 9 shooter in the past five decades, Xuan Ning, had just made this surprising comment. Sha Ya found herself very much surprised.

Ye Chong shook his head. "Everything has limitations. This applies to machines as well as parapsychic abilities. Your people understand too little about parapsychic abilities, and have not think of other ways to make use of them. That is why you feel like this now."

"What other ways?" Xuan Ning was inspired by Ye Chong's words. Sha Ya, on the other hand, could not keep up with the conversation.

Ye Chong did not elaborate further. He had to concentrate on driving the Spider.

The truth was, he had long realized what he shared just now. In terms of mental abilities, he had never seen anyone as powerful as the shooters of this world. Even the famed mentalists from Xi Feng Tribe fell short. Nevertheless, the shooters used their parapsychic abilities in very limited form. Xi Feng Tribe fared better in terms of

application variety.

Xi Feng Tribe's mentalists did not parapsychic abilities as strong as shooters at Level 5 or 6, but they had already mastered skills such as movement restriction. Experts like Huang Baiyi could even fight with him on even ground in close quarters. Unlike mentalists, shooters lost their combat abilities the moment they lost their guns.

Besides, Xi Feng Tribe's people had excellent battle coordination strategies, second only to the Sang Tribe, as the result of their mentalist skills. A normal mentalist mech pilot from Xi Feng Tribe was only on par with a fresh Level 3 shooter in terms of parapsychic strength, but the former could use their abilities in more creative ways.

When the Spider crossed the white rocky ridge, the environment around them transformed markedly.

A thin purple mist shrouded the place, blocked by the white rocky ridge on one side. The thin mist added a hint of mystery to everything in sight.

The place had higher humidity compared to the Desert.

"This is the Mist." Sha Ya said to Ye Chong when she noticed Xuan Ning was still deep in thought. Ye Chong was the leader of their expedition to Darkniss. He had also surprised Sha Ya with his demonstration in the Desert. Sha Ya had gradually come to think of Ye Chong as the decision maker for their group of three.

"The mist here is thin, but it will get thicker as we go on."

Ye Chong soon found that the light purple colored mist was highly disruptive to the holographic scanning system. The image on the screen was no longer clear. If the mist was to grow thicker as they progressed, then the Spider's holographic scanning system could no longer be relied upon.

"There's interference here. Both of you are in charge of security

and direction. I'll clear the path." Ye Chong ordered the two shooters like it was the natural thing to do.

"Alright," Sha Ya replied.

After staying quiet for so long, Xuan Ning felt excited again. "Hah, this is what I've been waiting for. There wasn't a chance to shoot since we first started, my hands are getting itchy." He eagerly reached for the firearms control lever in front of his seat.

Now that the two shooters were ready for battle, Ye Chong opened the hatch for the two laser guns they were controlling. These laser guns were more like laser cannons. Laser guns graded at 4 million Lux were considered quite powerful, but the Spider's laser gun could reach 12 million Lux. They were powerful monsters. Even an aircraft's laser cannon never exceeded 8 million Lux. The Spider's weapons, the mother of all laser guns, could also swivel around easily.

Ye Chong now had a Level 8 shooter and a Level 9 shooter behind his two very powerful weapons. Surely they must be enough for his own security.

Here in the Mist, the ground began to feel uneven. There were trees growing around them sparsely. As Sha Ya warned earlier, the mist was getting thicker, and the holographic scanning system was rendered useless. Ye Chong turned it off and switched to optical mode.

Ye Chong remembered the purple mist back in Yi Ju. The purple mist there was also disruptive to their holographic scanning system. It was impossible for holographic scanning to penetrate the purple gas cloud.

Ye Chong realized that the purple mist here and the one he saw in Yi Ju was eerily similar, and felt alarmed by the consequences.

"Left ... Left ... Right ... Right ..." Xuan Ning directed excitedly. He had to play the role of their holographic scanning system.

Under Xuan Ning's direction, the Spider moved at a moderate pace. Since, Ye Chong could not see the ground clearly, the Spider could not move with the stability they enjoyed back at the Desert.

There were more trees now. The Spider had to avoid them frequently.

"Stop!" Xuan Ning said.

"What is it?" Ye Chong asked.

Sha Ya said to Ye Chong, "Ahead of us is a thick forest. I don't think the Spider can enter." She remembered the forest clearly. No one who had been here before would be likely to forget the dense foliage.

Xuan Ning explained earnestly, "It's difficult to travel in there. The forest is dense, with creepers all over the place. There are swamps too. If you get stuck in one, you're dead already. Many shooters lost their lives here." He added, "Spidey here can't go inside, I'm afraid. What a pity." He caressed the firearms control lever regretfully, having not fired a single shot from it yet.

"How long does it take to cross the forest?" Ye Chong asked after some thought.

Xuan Ning reached for his memories. "We spent seven days last time."

Ye Chong turned to Sha Ya. The shooter smiled bitterly. "I wasn't so lucky. I spent 14 days in the forest, nearly went crazy from it."

The two shooters looked at Ye Chong. The forest was too dense for the huge Spider to move through. Nevertheless, they were reluctant to let go of the Spider.

Ye Chong considered the duration of seven to 14 days, and did some mental calculations. After a while, he nodded. "I have a plan."

"What?" Xuan Ning and Sha Ya looked at Ye Chong.

Ye Chong said nothing as he lowered his head and began to type on the control console.

A piece of armour on the Spider's left side slid open, revealing a weapon underneath. Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were using their parapsychic waves to monitor their surroundings. The movement did not escape their notice.

Suddenly, the Spider reached the first leg on its left towards the back to retrieve the strange weapon. Tap! The weapon was activated. They heard a whirring sound that came from fast rotation - it was a laser saw!

"It's huge!" Xuan Ning exclaimed. The laser saw was about nine meters long and three meters wide. It was a really huge weapon. However, the handle was small enough to store inside the Spider's body.

Xuan Ning and Sha Ya understood what Ye Chong's plan was. They exchanged a look and cried out in unison, "It's a good plan!" This way, they would not have to leave the Spider. The past few days were enough to make the two shooters love the Spider to bits.

With the huge laser saw clearing the path, the Spider could now advance faster. Any physical obstacles in the way were cleared or cut to pieces as the Spider waved its front left leg. Xuan Ning could only stare in amazement. "This thing's amazing! I say, what else do you have hidden in the Spider? This laser saw is d*mn powerful, haha, you have to fit my Spider with one too."

Ye Chong had originally wanted to bring a ship cannon, but the Spider could not bear the weight. The cannon would have cleared a path in the forest with just a few shots. However, since the ship cannon was too bulky, heavy and energy consuming, he had ditched the idea.

The laser saw was more than enough to clear a path in the forest.

The forest was humid, and the plants grew wildly.

Unfortunately, Ye Chong could see none of it from inside. This forest would surely be home to very valuable plants. Ye Chong had to be careful when maneuvering the Spider on soft layers of decomposing leaves on the ground. Besides, they were unlucky enough to have encountered a few swamps along the way. Fortunately, Ye Chong was able to react just in time in every encounter. The Spider's many legs helped. As long as at least one leg was not caught in the swamp, they would be able to break free with no issue.

Xuan Ning was very excited. The Spider's weapons were crazy powerful.

There were no large animals in the forest, only small ones, but Xuan Ning was still eager to test out his gun. It was like firing a cannon at a mosquito - now that was exhilarating!

Where before they had to worry about being attacked by harmful plants, now it was a negligible issue. The Spider was solid enough to resist attacks from these plants. Ye Chong had also closed all the airways that led outside. They were now running on an isolated air circulation system. Tranquilizing gas that came from the plants could no longer affect them.

There was also the problem of the swamps. If they were travelling on foot, they would have died many times over. The Spider had kept them intact throughout the journey.

The laser gun was such an overbearing weapon. Xuan Ning wanted to try it out himself.

Ye Chong could not see anything around him. He only hoped to cross the Mist as soon as possible. Without help from Xuan Ning and Sha Ya, the forest was too dangerous for him.

The Spider waved its huge laser saw left and right. The thick laser beam allowed the Spider to advance unhindered.

It took only three days for them to cross the Mist. By then, the

mist was becoming thinner. When the image on the screen cleared up, Ye Chong heaved a sigh of relief.

All around him was a long stretch of crimson colored wasteland. The crimson earth supported no plant life. The flat earth extended towards the horizon with no end in sight. Compared to the dense forest that was teeming with life, this desolate place was a sharp and unsettling contrast.

"The Red Wasteland is not a very big place. Judging by the speed of the Spider, we should be able to reach the entrance to Darkniss in a day and a half."

Sha Ya studied their surroundings and said to Ye Chong, "That way." She pointed at an angle towards the left.

Chapter 559: The Terrors of Darkniss

After travelling in the Red Wasteland for some time, the trio finally reached the entrance to Darkniss. When Ye Chong saw the entrance, he was stunned.

In the middle of the endless stretch of wasteland was a flat, black colored circle. It was 15 meters across, and suspended about 20 centimeters above the ground. It was like a gateway to another world.

Ye Chong was familiar with the black circle. He had seen it more than once. There was one in the underground tunnel, one on Yi Ju, and one in the Research Consortium's base on Spectre. The size of the black circles varied, but they were all black, perfectly circular, and suspended in the air. The similarities were there.

Xuan Ning and Sha Ya noticed Ye Chong's muted surprise. They had never seen that expression on him.

Xuan Ning was curious. He asked, "What is it? Have you been here before?"

Ye Chong quickly recovered himself and shook his head. "No."

"Let's go inside," Sha Ya interrupted them. "I always felt unsafe at the entrance. Let's go inside now."

"Alright." Ye Chong nodded. He moved the Spider closer to the black circle, ready to step through it. People with strong parapsychic sense had better instincts than normal people.

Xuan Ning smiled. "I once had that feeling too, but now I sense something new. The entrance feels unstable, but it's actually quite the opposite. A Level 8 shooter can sense its instability, but once you reach Level 9, you can sense that there is a very stable structure underneath the instability."

Xuan Ning had just finished speaking when a ripple appeared on the black circle.

"What was that?" Sha Ya gasped. She had never seen the entrance ripple like that.

Ye Chong looked at Xuan Ning. Was this really stable?

Xuan Ning look perturbed. "Something's not right. It became unstable suddenly, like it was stimulated by something." He closed his eyes and reached out with his parapsychic sense to the entrance. He had the strongest parapsychic sense of the three, and could detect the most minute details.

"Huh?" Xuan Ning opened his eyes wide and turned to Ye Chong with a weird expression. He said, "We should step back."

The Spider retreated about 10 meters away. The effect was immediately apparent. Once the Spider began retreating, the ripples at the entrance reduced until it eventually became flat again.

Ye Chong and Sha Ya could not understand what was happening.

Xuan Ning turned his attention to the ring on Ye Chong's finger. He hesitated before speaking again, "Your ring is a little odd. It was the cause of the instability at the entrance."

Ring? Sha Ya looked at the inconspicuous ring on Ye Chong's finger. It did not look particularly interesting to her.

"Celest's dimension keystone?" Ye Chong thought to himself in surprise. How was the ring responsible for this?

Ye Chong suddenly remembered the time when he was in the Research Consortium's laboratory on Spectre. The spatial window in the corner of the lab had transformed abruptly and sent him to Dual Forest. Could that be related to his ring too?

Xuan Ning saw the confusion on Ye Chong's and Sha Ya's faces. He explained, "I don't know what happened either, but I can sense that the ring was causing the entrance to become unstable. The structure of the entrance seems to be affected by it. Once we back off, the entrance returned to normal. It looks like distance is key

here. Hmm, the entrance feels normal now. The structure of the entrance is stable."

Ye Chong lifted his right hand pointed at the ring on it with his left hand. "This one?"

Xuan Ning nodded. "That's the one." He saw the inquiring look on Ye Chong and shrugged. "Don't ask me why because I don't know either." Ye Chong's ring looked ordinary. He could not understand what was happening as well.

Sha Ya watched Xuan Ning admiringly. This was the difference between Level 8 and Level 9. Xuan Ning could sense the structure of the entrance with his parapsychic sense, and even feel it transforming. What a powerful skill! Sha Ya never imagined that parapsychic sense could do this. Level 9 was almost a legend. People could only imagine what a Level 9 shooter was capable of. She just witnessed the true strength of a Level 9 shooter, and it was much more powerful than anyone could have imagined!

Ye Chong considered their situation for a moment and pointed at the entrance. He asked, "What is its structure like?" He was also curious about Xuan Ning's ability to sense the structure of the spatial window. His parapsychic sense was strong!

Xuan Ning shook his head in chagrin. "I can't say for sure. It's strange and mysterious! I don't know how to express it."

Ye Chong tried again with a more straightforward question. "How can we safely pass through the entrance?" He did not want to spend too much time on this problem. The fact that Celest's dimension keystone could disrupt the spatial window was already a very important piece of information for him.

Xuan Ning looked at Ye Chong. He could see that the man would not leave the ring behind. He considered the problem for awhile. "If we could approach the entrance fast, it should not be a problem."

"I see," Ye Chong nodded. His fingers tapped on the control console, and the Spider lunged towards the entrance without warning.

Xuan Ning was thrown backwards. He hit the back of his head on his seat and screamed like a madman. Xuan Ning roared, "Can't you at least warn us?"

Sha Ya threw a pitiful look at Xuan Ning, the admiration she felt for him fading fast. She marveled at how a Level 9 shooter was helpless against the unpredictable man, Ye Chong.

Once the Spider was close to the entrance, ripples began to form on the flat surface again. Ye Chong ignored the ripples and focused on piloting the Spider. The Spider charged head on towards the black circle and went right through it.

The surroundings turned dark. The image on the holographic screen was completely different now.

It was very, very dark. Only a faint light allowed them to see their surroundings. The sky was dark. There were stars and moons in the sky. Nevertheless, darkness was not the only thing that defined this place. There was also a bright, hot red in sight - lava.

Hot lava flowed like rough waters, splashing violently as they went along deep trenches. The fiery waves could reach up to 8 meters tall. Despite being in the Spider, they could still feel the heat emanating from the lava.

There was a main branch of lava river that was about 30 meters wide. It branched out into thinner flows going downstream, like roots of a tree.

Ye Chong had never seen anything so magnificent. He was distracted for a moment.

"Leave the entrance now!" Xuan Ning shouted panickedly. "Quick! It's becoming unstable!"

Ye Chong quickly focused himself and pulled the Spider away

from the black entrance.

The ripples on the entrance subsided once more and became flat again. Ye Chong watched the spatial window, suspended in midair, and felt fascinated by it. This place was completely different from the Red Wasteland outside, but just by stepping through the "door", they had arrived in a whole new world. The whole process was even more mysterious than warp jumps.

Unfortunately, Ye Chong knew very little about spatial science. He did not understand the working principles behind them.

Xuan Ning was still not over his shock. "Good thing we left quickly, or we would be in deep trouble."

Of the three of them, Xuan Ning was probably the only one who truly understood the severity of their situation just now.

Sha Ya said to Ye Chong, "We are now in Darkniss. We call that huge river the Lava River. Usually, we will travel along the Lava River. The River will sometimes change its course, but the general direction is the same. This way, we will not lose our way."

Darkniss - this was Darkniss!

Once they were in Darkniss, both Xuan Ning and Sha Ya turned serious. Their hands never left the firearms control lever. This made Ye Chong even more wary.

The Spider walked along the Lava River. Everything they saw was tinged red due to the light coming from the lava.

It was just a short while before Ye Chong found a few pieces of high quality metal ores along the way. Darkniss was truly the place to find gravestones. The bright red lava would also have familiar circular patterns that were actually metals in liquid form.

Soon, Ye Chong understood why Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were nervous. They encountered a pack of 80 black striped gray dragons. It was rare to see such a huge pack. These dragons usually move in packs of 20 to 30.

Ye Chong saw his first black striped gray dragon.

The animals were beaked and had sharp claws. Their bodies were gray with black stripes, and reached up to three meters long. Their wingspan, however, was close to 10 meters long. They flew fast and were aggressive in nature.

The Spider was large and hard to miss. The black striped gray dragons thought that this unfamiliar creature would taste delightful.

Xuan Ning reacted first. He was nervous since they first stepped into Darkniss.

A thick laser beam shot right through a black striped gray dragon, leaving a 30 centimeter wide circular hole in its wake. The dragon stopped breathing immediately. Its wings froze and it fell straight down from the sky.

Lasers began to fire. Xuan Ning's attack marked the beginning of their battle. Sha Ya reacted quickly as well. The black striped gray dragons fell one by one like loose kites, kicking up dirt as they crashed into the ground.

The sudden attacks surprised the dragons, but they were soon angered by them. The dragons screamed sharply and flapped their wings, making their way towards the Spider.

Ye Chong did not expect how fast these creatures could fly. Without a mech, he would have trouble dealing with these dragons. Since they were diving from a high altitude, the attacks from these black striped gray dragons must be very powerful. Even thin alloy boards would give way to their attack.

Fortunately, shooters were the best combatants at medium range. This battle was perfect for them. Ye Chong did not have to worry about his safety, since he had a Level 8 shooter and a Level 9 shooter with him. The black striped gray dragons were strong, but not enough to threaten these two excellent shooters.

Ye Chong even had time to enjoy watching the marksmanship of these two shooters.

They were both very good at what they do. Almost none of the shots missed. Besides, they were not using normal laser guns, but super powerful laser guns at 1.2 million Lux. Every shot was powerful enough to penetrate the bodies of the black striped gray dragons, which were relatively weaker beings in Darkniss. Even if the shot missed any vulnerabilities, it would still affect their flight speed.

Soon, both shooters gained the upper hand. The powerful firepower aimed at the dragons suppressed their movements. Their flying formation was wrecked. Dragons continued to fall from the sky. However, this pack of dragons was stubborn. They were quick and agile in the air. Since Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were still not used to the Spider's two main laser guns, they were shooting down the dragons fast enough.

There were still at least 40 dragons in the air still, but Ye Chong was not worried. He could see that Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were already getting better at using the laser guns. This was obvious from their increasing firing frequency.

The battle was in the favor of Xuan Ning and Sha Ya. As time passed, their advantage increased further.

Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were both concentrating. Their eyes were closed one-sided so that they would not be distracted by anything visual. On the contrary, Ye Chong was just an observer, enjoying the intense but uninteresting battle.

Suddenly, he caught a movement at the corner of the screen. He quickly turned his attention that particular corner on the screen.

There were only dark rocks and nothing else there. However, Ye Chong was certain that he saw something earlier.

Ye Chong maneuvered the holographic scanning system to

perform a detailed search on that area. The screen was showing the opposite side of the Lava River.

"Huh, what's that?"

There was some hair jutting from behind a rock. Something was wrong! Ye Chong focused on the situation. Those hair must be from some animal! The hair was black and shiny, standing up straight like needles.

Ye Chong took a peek at the black striped gray dragons in the air and dismissed the idea of using the Hummingbirds. Of the four Hummingbirds he prepared, one was lost in the sandstorm, leaving only three with him. This was not the time to use the Hummingbirds.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong had no intention to sit just sit back and do nothing. He had many options to choose from. His hands quickly tapped on the control console. Suddenly, the Spider's tail armor slid open to the sides. A cannon array rose up slowly from inside. Animals that knew to hide from its enemy were much more dangerous - this was something Ye Chong knew very well.

Compared to the 49-barrel cannon array that Ye Chong sold to Sun Sieha, this cannon array had 81 cannon barrels, each thicker than that of the original model by a third. These 91 cannon barrels formed a nine-by-nine cannon array. The long, smooth cannon barrel were tightly arranged together.

When the cannon array was activated, both Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were momentarily distracted by the danger that emanated from the weapon.

"What is he trying to do?"

That was the thought that came to Xuan Ning and Sha Ya. The black striped gray dragons were already under their control. They could not attack, but they could not run either. Winning was only a matter of time. If that was the case, why would Ye Chong

suddenly activate the cannon array?

They also did not know beforehand that the Spider was armed with this weapon.

Ye Chong aimed at the black hair that protruded from the rock on the screen, and pressed down hard on the firing button.

Each cannon barrel in the cannon array could fire 10 shots of spheric photon grenades per second. These grenades were highly explosive.

Boom! The cannon array roared!

810 spheric photon grenades were shot towards the target that Ye Chong had chosen.

The grenades all landed within 15 meters off the target. The resulting explosion was massive!

The loud explosion was enough to send a whole person shaking. Close to a thousand grenades exploded at the same time. Ye Chong's target area now had a big mushroom cloud over it. The explosion had destroyed all the rocks around as well. A shockwave blasted out visibly from the center of the explosion.

Aooh! Two low howls came from a distance.

When the dust settled, Ye Chong saw in front of him two black colored leopards with an inch-wide stripe of white on their backs. There was also a small patch of white fur on their foreheads that contrasted beautifully against the black sleek fur on their bodies. The animals had an elegant build, with four muscular limbs; nevertheless, they were now in a tight corner.

There were small, charred holes on their black fur. The animals were injured all over. Some of the wounds were still bleeding. Despite their injuries, the animals moved with grace. They stared at Ye Chong coldly.

Beside the two leopards was a third one, lying on the ground. It

suffered far worse injuries than its companions. Its body was a bloody mess. This was the animal that Ye Chong saw earlier, and the one who was hit the most from the blast. With close to a thousand photon grenades exploding within 15 meters from the target, no animal could survive the attack. Its two companions were also injured from the explosion.

"Snowshade leopards!" Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were following Ye Chong's actions closely. They saw the two wild animals now and gasped in surprise. Ye Chong could hear the fear in their voices.

These animals must be avoided at all cost! Ye Chong made the decision immediately. His hands moved across the control console, and the Spider began to run.

To think that he would encounter three snowshade leopards! He only saw one just now. As expected, non-combat holographic scanning was unreliable! Ye Chong did not know what was so scary about these snowshade leopards, but he trusted the judgement of Xuan Ning and Sha Ya.

The two snowshade leopards watched their now dead and unrecognizable companion, and then looked their beautiful fur, now marked with hundreds of charred holes. They howled again!

Aoooh!

The black striped gray dragons heard the howls and quickly made their escape.

Before the echoes of the howls disappeared, the two snowshade leopards ran.

The Spider ran as quick as it could. Both Xuan Ning and Sha Ya had already directed their laser guns at the snowshade leopards.

"I say, what'd you do to get in trouble with the snowshade leopards? My God, there are three of them!" Xuan Ning almost went crazy with the thought.

Sha Ya bit her lips down tightly, and kept very quiet. She was

obviously nervous as hell.

Ye Chong did not expect a Level 9 shooter to feel so alarmed by the snowshade leopards. It seemed that they were in big trouble.

Ye Chong soon experienced the terror of the snowshade leopards first hand.

On the screen, he saw the two snowshade leopards raced towards them like bolts of lightning. They were fast! Ye Chong found it hard to describe exactly how fast they were! They were running on the ground as fast as a mech could fly in the air. It was that fast!

The two snowshade leopards could run as fast as a mech. This was a strong visual impression. Their every step on the ground resulted in cracks in the earth. They were so powerful that it was paralyzing to just think about it. Their streamlined bodies ran like the force of nature. They charged like a heavyweight mech. The ground shook and rumbled at their every step.

It was impossible to lock on to them because of their speed.

The two snowshade leopards seemed to be wary of the Spider's cannon array. They darted left and right as they made their pursuit.

High speed veering, Non-orderly wavy evasions, Sidestep Bursts, Z-steps ...

Ye Chong stared blankly at them. What was this? The animals were practically demonstrating how a professional close range mech pilot would long avoid long range attacks.

No wonder Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were so afraid of them.

"To think that we'd see these monsters right after we enter Darkniss. Our luck sucks." Xuan Ning shrugged casually. "Oh, by the way, you should know that energy weapons are ineffective against snowshade leopard. Their fur is a tough protective material. Oh, I don't know if these 1.2 million Lux graded laser guns are good against them."

Ye Chong did not know if the two main laser guns could harm the snowshade leopards, but he did know that a concentrated attack of spheric photon grenades could pose a threat towards them.

The Spider was still running for its life. The cannon array that rose from its tail swiveled round easily.

The snowshade leopards were too fast for their non-combat holographic scanning system to lock on to. Even if Ye Chong decided to deploy Celest now, it would be useless. The only weapon could harm the snowshade leopards was the cannon array - that was what Ye Chong thought.

Boom boom boom! The cannon array fired. To Ye Chong's surprise, the two snowshade leopards were able to avoid the intense grenade attack aimed at them.

"Once snowshade leopards start running, their sixth sense would be greatly enhanced. Even I can't lock on to them. The photon grenades are slow compared to laser beams, so they can avoid them without difficulty. This is the interesting bit about snowshade leopards. Once they start running, they seem to be hypersensitive to energy. It's impossible to hit them with laser beams. They are the nemesis of all shooters." Sha Ya explained to Ye Chong while firing a few shots at the snowshade leopards. The animals avoided her attacks easily. Sha Ya was looking a little pale. She had never encountered these deadly creatures before, despite having heard of them for a long time.

Sha Ya had just finished speaking when the snowshade leopards closed the distance between them even more. They were now only three kilometers away. The distance was getting smaller at an alarming rate. The only thing that comforted Ye Chong was the fact that the leopards were separated from them by the Lava River. If the snowshade leopards wanted to attack them, they must first cross the Lava River. However, the thinnest part of the River was 20 meters across. It formed a natural barrier between them.

The two snowshade leopards ran quickly, leaving a clear trail of footprints behind them. Each footprint was surrounded by cracks in the earth.

The animals got closer and closer to the Lava River, but they showed no signs of stopping.

They reached the edge of the River and leaped into the air!

Ye Chong's eyes widened. At the moment the animals made the leap, he could already tell that they would be able to make it to the other side. Ye Chong pressed down on the firing button without delay.

At that moment, two laser beams shot out from the Spider towards the snowshade leopards, still in midair. This was the perfect opportunity shoot! Xuan Ning and Sha Ya took their shots together instinctively.

The two snowshade leopards suddenly twisted their bodies in seemingly impossible ways, and both laser beams missed their mark.

Another two laser beams followed. Both Sha Ya and Xuan Ning were the best of the best in their field. Despite knowing how strong the snowshade leopards were, they would not give up without a fight!

The snowshade leopardsshowed exactly how superior they were by twisting their bodies again in the air, despite having no foothold to support their movements. Both laser beams missed once again. The creatures had terrifyingly powerful and agile bodies.

Nevertheless, Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were both set on killing the two snowshade leopards before they landed. Another two laser beams were fired!

The outcome this time was different. Xuan Ning's laser beam hit at center of the forehead of his target, right on the white patch of hair. Bang! The snowshade leopard's head exploded while the body

crashed heavily onto the rocks on the other side of the Lava River.

Sha Ya's laser beam missed by just a fraction. It graced the ear of the other snowshade leopard as it made its landing.

With only half an ear left from the laser beam attack, the snowshade leopard's cold eyes turned red. It sprinted from the pain, running even faster than before, leaving only an afterimage in its wake!

Xuan Ning and Sha Ya looked horrified. That was their best chance at killing the snowshade leopards. Now that they had missed the opportunity, they were all done for.

However, Xuan Ning quickly recovered himself. He saw Sha Ya with her bloody lips, feeling guilty about having missed, and said to her with a consoling smile, "It's not your fault. You did your best. Truth is, I wasn't sure if I could hit my mark just now. They're too fast. If I hadn't reach Level 9, I would have died if I ever encountered them before this. We killed one snowshade leopard, and that's quite amazing already. Haha, this laser gun is quite awesome, it can kill even a snowshade leopard."

Sha Ya kept quiet, but she looked soothed. Xuan Ning was right. She did her best. The snowshade leopards were terrible monsters that lived in the inner parts of Darkniss. It must be fate that they encountered these animals so near the entrance of Darkniss.

If Xuan Ning and Sha Ya could miss, Ye Chong's amateur shooting would not harm the snowshade leopard at all. Nevertheless, Ye Chong was not about to give up now!

An auxiliary grenade silently flew out of the weapons chamber. It was directed not at the snowshade leopard, but above the Spider.

The snowshade leopard moved like a bolt of black lightning. It was too fast to aim at! When the auxiliary grenade reached 10 meters above the ground, the animal was already two kilometers away. Xuan Ning and Sha Ya had missed the opening, but still they

did not give up. They continued firing at the last snowshade leopard.

Their attacks were in vain, however. The snowshade leopard stared angrily at the Spider with its blood-red eyes. It avoided all the laser beams with ease.

When the auxiliary grenade reached 50 meters high, the snowshade leopard was one kilometer away from the Spider.

At 50 meters above the Spider, the grenade exploded, but with no sound or light effects.

By then, the snowshade leopard was 300 meters away from the Spider.

On the screen, they could see the ferocity in the blood-red eyes of the snowshade leopard!

Suddenly, the Spider activated the huge laser saw in its leg. It seemed that Ye Chong opted for a close range battle as his last resort.

The snowshade leopard's whiskers quivered as though it was laughing at his effort. The animal did not slow down. Instead, it twisted its body and landed heavily on the ground on all fours.

Boom! Even from inside the Spider, Ye Chong and the two shooters could hear the animal made its landing.

Where the snowshade leopard landed, the ground fragmented. The animal borrowed momentum from its landing and darted towards the bottom of the Spider.

Only Ye Chong saw what happened. Both Xuan Ning and Sha Ya only saw a blur, and lost sight of the snowshade leopard.

Crack! The snowshade leopard had bitten off the Spider's leg that held the laser saw. Both the dismembered limb and the laser saw fell onto the ground. The fast rotating edge of the laser saw buried itself into the ground.

Boom!

There was a deafening sound.

The three of them felt a strong blow coming from below them. Suddenly, the world was sent spinning. The image on the screen turned and turned. Sha Ya and Xuan Ning were both thrown out of their seats towards the pilot cabin's inner wall.

Ye Chong reacted the fastest. He gripped tightly onto his seat, counting the seconds.

Now!

Chapter 560: An Idea

The huge spider rolled on the ground. The snowshade leopard's attack was powerful enough to flip the spider, which was many times its size, upside down. Sha Ya and Xuan Ning, who were inside the pilot cabin, were both dizzy from the hit. Only Ye Chong maintained his calm. However, he was also surprised by the strength of the snowshade leopard.

Even Ye Chong could not flip the huge spider over, despite how strong he was. The snowshade leopard was much stronger than he was. The animals were small but powerful, and moved very quickly. They knew how to move evasively, and their fur served as good defense. They were very powerful creatures!

Nevertheless, all creatures have their weaknesses. The stronger an animal was, the harder it was to identify its weakness. However, this weakness would also be very dangerous for the animal.

Ye Chong took a glance at Sha Ya and Xuan Ning. After determining that they were uninjured, he focused back onto the fight. Ye Chong closed his eyes and listened, as the world outside turned quiet again.

Ye Chong's hearing was sharp. This was a trait that all combat experts valued.

Ye Chong stepped lightly towards the entrance of the huge spider. The spider had its belly towards the sky. The entrance was thus above Ye Chong's head.

He carefully opened the hatch and listened to the outside. There was no sound at all.

Ye Chong came out of the huge spider and soon found the snowshade leopard. The powerful creature was now lying quietly on the ground, as though it was asleep.

It seemed that the knockout agent was working perfectly. Ye Chong sighed in relief. The snowshade leopard was powerful. Ye Chong would not fight against them without a mech. This encounter was quite a close call. It had been long since Ye Chong had been in such a dangerous situation. He did not expect to encounter such a terrifying animal so soon after they entered Darkniss. Ye Chong believed that this creature was as strong as the red-tailed beasts.

Darkniss was a terrifying place.

Ye Chong held his breath and took out a strong poison. He opened the flask and waved the opening before the snowshade leopard's nose a few times. The snowshade leopard convulsed, then subsided. It was good policy to be careful. The snowshade leopard's strength had shaken Ye Chong. He did not want any more surprises. He turned his attention towards where the snowshade leopard had attacked the huge spider. There were cracks on the surface now, proof of how strong the attack was.

It seemed that he had to change the armor in that area. Fortunately, he brought the tools just for occasions like this.

Just then, Sha Ya and Xuan Ning crawled out of the huge spider with difficulty.

Both of them stopped before the snowshade leopard and studied the creature with curiosity and fear.

"What a scary thing, it's so strong," Xuan Ning sighed, "I've heard of these creatures, but now I know that the stories fall short of the real thing. I think only a Level 10 shooter has a comfortable advantage against this animal." Nevertheless, he quickly added for Ye Chong's benefit, "Of course, you're an exception." Ye Chong had many tricks up his sleeves. The snowshade leopards were tame compared to the man himself. Xuan Ning would rather face three snowshade leopards than Ye Chong.

Sha Ya carefully moved closer to the snowshade leopard. "Isn't

the snowshade leopard usually in the inner parts of Darkniss? Why are they here?"

"Who knows?" Xuan Ning shrugged. He seemed to think of something, and his expression quickly turned serious, "It's been strange in recent years. Usually, the snowshade leopard and those red-tailed creatures live in the inner parts of Darkniss. We encountered a poisoned red-tailed beast just recently, and today we encountered a snowshade leopard. Perhaps something has happened in Darkniss recently."

Ye Chong heard him, and asked, "How will that be a problem?"

"It's a huge problem," Xuan Ning explained, "Here in Darkniss, every species has their own territories with very strict borders. The further in you go, the clearer these boundaries are. The snowshade leopard, for example, never wandered beyond their own territory. That we saw a snowshade leopard here near the border of Darkniss means that we're in serious trouble."

"Why is that?"

"Think about it. If these three snowshade leopards left Darkniss, entered Dual Forest, and then went into Eastern Cloud, they would definitely raise havoc. What if it wasn't just three, but a whole pack of snowshade leopards? There are many powerful creatures like this in Darkniss. If they all left Darkniss, no one can stop them. It will be the end for us all."

Sha Ya agreed with Xuan Ning. "It's a very important signal for us, seeing the snowshade leopards near the entrance into Darkniss. I have a bad feeling about this."

"Haha, let's not worry too much about it. If we continue deeper in, perhaps we'll come to understand the reason for it all," Xuan Ning forced a laugh and said.

Ye Chong was not particularly worried about their concern. He was, after all, not really from Eastern Cloud. He climbed back into

the huge spider's pilot cabin and took out a specimen collection apparatus. He wanted to take a few tissue samples from the snowshade leopard. The creature was strong and fast, and its fur could block energy weapons effectively. It was the only animal Ye Chong knew that was as strong as the red-tailed beast. It was hard to believe that there was so much power in this small animal's body. The animal's muscle structure must be close to perfection.

This was very important for Ye Chong. Celest's muscle structure, despite being the product of the Research Consortium's endless resources and manpower, was still a long way from the snowshade leopard. If Celest could have a muscle structure as strong as the snowshade leopard's, it would definitely become a more powerful and terrifying weapon.

Celest's ability to evolve implied that it had the potential to be improved upon.

Ye Chong carefully extracted samples from various parts of the snowshade leopard. He would be able to grow them into a larger tissue mass with the same properties back at his place with only a tiny sample,. He would then figure out a way to replace Celest's muscle structure with the snowshade leopard's. Of course, there were still many technical issues in the whole process, but Ye Chong was confident that he could solve them when the time came.

The snowshade leopard's fur was a strong defense layer. Ye Chong had to put in some force to collect the tissue samples.

Xuan Ning and Sha Ya paled as they watched Ye Chong's every move. To them, Ye Chong's operation was both creepy and scary to consider. What an evil man, to exploit an animal even when it was dead! Moreover, the vacuum specimen container next to Ye Chong was a mystery to both of them.

They both watched as Ye Chong took out his laser sword and dissected the snowshade leopard like it was only a routine job. It was a bloody mess. They suppressed the urge to vomit and quickly

went back into the huge spider.

Ye Chong picked up biology very quickly with Kui's three chips. This was obvious from the way he went about the dissection. He began awkwardly, but soon became familiar with the moves.

Ye Chong returned to the pilot cabin with his vacuum specimen container, satisfied with the day's rewards. The danger was beyond his expectations, but so was his reward.

In biology, a tissue sample was sometimes enough to change everything.

For the moment, they could not continue forward. The Spider needed repairs. Naturally, Ye Chong was charged with the technical work. Xuan Ning and Sha Ya sat together on a huge rock, drinking and enjoying some snacks while Ye Chong did his work. It was a pleasant moment. Having survived after being so close to death, they found that even sitting around drinking and chatting was one of the best things in life.

Ye Chong worked quickly. He was much more skilled in machinery than biology. Besides, he was well prepared for the incident. He had all the tools and spare parts he needed.

Soon, the three of them were back in the Spider and on their way.

For some reason, the rest of the trip went smoothly. Aside from an encounter with a few black-striped gray dragons, they did not see any more creatures that were as scary as the snowshade leopard.

Sha Ya and Xuan Ning were still curious about Ye Chong. He seemed to picking up everything he could see along the way. It was understandable when he collected rocks or things that weaponsmiths may be interested in. However, he would sometimes collect even flowers, grass and moss. When they came across puddles, Ye Chong would also collect water samples.

Sha Ya and Xuan Ning were baffled by Ye Chong's strange behavior, but they knew that they could not stop him. Hence, they could only actively ignore him.

Ye Chong was absorbed in his collection activity. Darkniss was like a hidden treasure to him. There were so many metals here that even he did not recognize, and all kinds of new plants. There was a huge variety of metals in this place, and all in great amounts and high purity. It was a real treasure trove of natural resources. Many of the plants were also valuable ingredients for alchemy.

Metal was very important to Ye Chong. He had plenty of processing equipment. If he had metals, he would be able to build numerous things, such as mechs, or even starships.

If he could build a base here ...

Ye Chong was moved by the thought.

Chapter 561: Going Further

Ye Chong collected a great deal of mineral samples. Fortunately, the Spider had enough storage space to keep them. Darkniss was truly a place of treasures. Ye Chong kept thinking about it. If there was a place like this in the He Yue Galaxy or the Five Galaxies, people would definitely try to gain control of this place, no matter how strong the creatures who lived there were.

Nevertheless, here in this world, only shooters at Level 7 and above could enter. This made Darkniss an unexplored territory. This same place was like a beacon for Ye Chong. Ye Chong was more familiar with metals than any other material. He believed that he if could build a base in here, it would offer him many important advantages. In particular, it would speed up his progress in finding a way to return to the He Yue Galaxy.

This was a plan for the future. In the short term, he did not have the ability to build a base here. Building a base here without enough power in Darkniss would be like serving himself on a silver platter to the animals that lived here.

His objective in visiting Darkniss this time was clear – he wanted to have a better understanding of the place.

They walked along Lava River and continued forward.

...

This was their seventh day in Darkniss. The Lava River was already far behind them.

"No one's been here before, I'm sure. We are very likely the first humans to enter this place," Xuan Ning said with a smile, "This is all thanks for this Spider. We wouldn't have been able to go so deep into Darkniss."

The huge spider was slower than a mech, but it was still much faster than walking. It would take a shooter like Sha Ya more than

a month to cover the distance traveled by the Spider in seven days. As far as Xuan Ning and Sha Ya knew, no one had ever stayed in Darkniss for so long.

The terrain around them was now very different compared to a few days ago.

The forest was thicker. There were more metals around, lying on the ground in small pieces. The sky was darker. Lava was not spotted as frequently as when they first entered Darkniss. Most of them were tiny branches of lava flow. There were more fluorescent plants as well. Some of them looked like trees covered with metal hooks that shined in a bright white color, giving the illusion of a metal tree with dazzling silver flowers.

During the occasional breeze, thousands and millions of spores would scatter into the wind, glowing a faint purple light like in a fairytale.

There were all kinds of plants in here, many that Ye Chong had never seen before. The golden leaf that Sha Ya gave to Ye Chong when they first met came from a plant that was seen everywhere in this place. The plant had a significant metal content. Probably up to 90 percent of the plant's composition was metal. This made the plants robust enough to survive the harsh environment.

There was a kind of flat, black colored weed. The leaves of the weed were at least 15 meters long. Ye Chong thought of them as alloy ropes. They were flexible and resilient, much stronger than even the usual alloy ropes. These black colored weeds grew in wide patches on the ground. They were a strong species that could be seen everywhere they looked.

Xuan Ning and Sha Ya had never been so deep inside Darkniss before. They looked around them curiously. Ye Chong, however, was relatively calm. He had seen too many strange things, such as the Archipelago where the Sang Tribe lived. That was also a place full of inexplicable things.

The wild animals here were sensitive creatures. Most of them would stay away, watching the huge spider from afar.

The animals here were not huge. The Spider was relatively big compared to anything else here. They had not yet encountered any animals that reached 10 meters tall, like the red-tailed beast.

Ye Chong quickly noticed that the wild animals here kept to their own territories. Apart from that, they had seen nothing strange along the way. Why, then, would the snowshade leopards appear near the entrance of Darkniss?

Ye Chong suddenly thought of something. He asked, "Where do the snowshade leopards live?"

"I don't know," Xuan Ning and Sha Ya answered in unison.

"Didn't you say that no one has ever come so deep into Darkniss? How do you know about the snowshade leopards?" Ye Chong asked.

Sha Ya replied, "I've seen the snowshade leopard in the autobiography of a legendary shooter. It's written by the only Level 10 shooter in the history of Eastern Cloud."

Ye Chong looked to Xuan Ning, who nodded and said, "I also knew about it from Lascher's book. The book describes the snowshade leopard's characteristics and great strength."

"What you're saying is, someone has been here before, and perhaps even deeper inside?" Ye Chong found the crux of the matter.

"Who knows? Lascher's been dead for over 300 years. Can't ask a dead soul, can I?" Xuan Ning said jokingly.

Suddenly, Ye Chong pointed towards the screen and cried out, "Someone's here!"

"What? Are you joking? How can anyone be here?" Xuan Ning asked in disbelief.

Sha Ya followed Ye Chong's finger and looked. "There's someone here!" she gasped.

To the front and right of the Spider was a cliff. At the foot of the cliff was a huge rock, which a person was standing on. Around the rock were dozens of horned tyrasaurs.

Horned tyrasaurs were not huge, reaching the height of an adult human when standing. Each horned tyrasaur had a single horn on its forehead. Its body was covered with many tiny scales that offered strong protection. They were fast and aggressive animals. A lone horned tyrasaur was not as strong as a snowshade leopard, but the animals often hunted together in a pack of dozens. They were also capable of impressive coordination, and were difficult to get rid of.

Fortunately, they had only encountered a few horned tyrasaurs along the way. The Spider's two powerful main laser guns and the pair of capable shooters onboard helped them ward off the animals effectively.

Now, they were watching a single person facing off against a whole pack of horned tyrasaurs! From the looks of it, the person was fighting calmly in a way that suggested experience.

Xuan Ning and Sha Ya were both flabbergasted. There was a human right here! They exchanged a look in disbelief to what they were seeing. Xuan Ning had been so certain that no one would be able to go so far into Darkniss without Ye Chong's Spider, but now, someone was obviously here before them!

Who could possibly be so strong?

Unfortunately, they were too far away to make out the person's face.

In the short instance when they were hesitating, some of the horned tyrasaurs surrounding the rock had already fallen to the ground. The rock was about 10 meters tall, and the animals could

not reach up far enough. They could only leap up seven to eight meters high. It was a mystery how that person managed to get onto that rock.

The person had a laser gun, and was shooting at them with no hurry.

The mysterious shooter's laser gun did not seem particularly powerful. It was, in fact, much weaker than the two main laser guns of their Spider. However, the shooter was patient, firing shot after shot with great accuracy at the same spot until the scales of the horned tyrasaurs finally crumbled. It took about five shots to kill a horned tyrasaur, but Ye Chong had never seen anyone fired so fast before. The average laser gun became a terrifying weapon in the shooter's hands.

Sha Ya looked anxious. Even Xuan Ning, as a Level 9 shooter, was sweating.

"Do you know the shooter?" Ye Chong asked.

"I can't see the face," Xuan Ning said as she narrowed her eyes, trying to identify the shooter. Sha Ya shook her head as well.

Ye Chong moved the Spider a little closer. By the Spider's third step, all three of them felt something.

Parapsychic waves! These were strong parapsychic waves!

Now it was Ye Chong's turn to be surprised. He estimated at least 15 kilometres between them and the shooter. That the shooter's parapsychic sense could extend so far out was amazing! Xuan Ning's eyes lit up. For the first time since he reached Level 9, he extended his parapsychic sense as far out as he could reach.

Sha Ya extended her parapsychic sense to her limit as well.

Ye Chong quickly calmed himself down, being in the middle of all three strong parapsychic waves. He returned his attention to the screen.

The unknown shooter seemed to notice their presence, and looked towards them.

By now, they could all see the shooter's face. To everyone's surprise, the powerful shooter was actually a woman!

When Xuan Ning saw her face clearly, he shivered. His expression was one of shock and disbelief when he cried out, "It's her!"

Ye Chong threw a side glance at Xuan Ning and asked, "You know her?" Sha Ya looked to him as well.

"Quick, help her," Xuan Ning said firmly, "I'll explain later."

Ye Chong heard him. He immediately had the Spider running towards the woman. Sha Ya and Xuan Ning went to their weapons stations without delay.

With a Level 8 shooter and a Level 9 shooter behind the Spider's powerful weapons, the horned tyrasaurs were quickly overpowered. The Spider's two main laser guns could easily tear through the horned tyrasaur's layer of scales.

The woman was surprised by the powerful weapons of the Spider. However, she gathered herself quickly and continued firing at the horned tyrasaurs.

In just a short moment, most of the horned tyrasaurs had already fallen, leaving only about a dozen of them left. These survivors realized their terrible position and escaped without looking back.

The huge spider brought three of its riders towards the huge rock.

The rock had a smooth surface, with no anchor points for climbing. It was hard to imagine how the female shooter got onto the rock. The woman took one last glance at the huge spider, then slid down along the surface of the rock. She kept close to the rock and made her way down smoothly.

Ye Chong was surprised by her manoeuvre. If he had not seen her shooting the horned tyrasaurs, he would have thought she was a combat expert, and a pretty good one at that.

Xuan Ning lowered his voice and said, "She is Mei Wu. Mind your words." He took a look at Ye Chong and felt the advice wasted on him.

Mei Wu sounded familiar. Ye Chong tried to recall when he had heard that name.

Sha Ya had a complicated expression on her face.

The three of them came out of the huge spider, and Ye Chong finally had a good look of the woman called Mei Wu. She had long eyes and thin lips, with an air of apathy about her. She wore an old and gray colored combat uniform, and had a laser gun of an old design in her hand.

Mei Wu watched the newcomers. When she saw Xuan Ning, her eyes lit up in recognition. "So it's Sir Xuan. Seems that this lady is safe thanks to you." Her voice was sharp and stressed with mockery.

Xuan Ning bowed in greeting. He shrugged helplessly and said, "You're too kind. I hope I was not interfering with your fight. How did you get here? His Majesty has missed you all these years."

"His Majesty?" Mei Wu laughed coldly. "Looks like he finally got the throne, just as he wished. Missed me? Just what kind of relationship is there between us? Since when did he dictate where I should be?"

Xuan Ning had nothing to say to that. He kept his head bowed low and his mouth shut.

"Whatever, it's not your fault anyway. You don't have to look like that. You're his subordinate, and you've got nothing to do with me." Mei Wu sighed, as though she had remembered something.

Ye Chong watched the two of them, amused. He finally

remembered who Mei Wu was – she was the Shu sisters' teacher. What luck to have met her in Darkniss.

Mei Wu studied Xuan Ning for a moment and asked, "You've reached Level 9?"

Xuan Ning nodded obediently and replied, "Yes, just recently."

Mei Wu smiled coldly and said, "He's going to be very happy about this. Tsk tsk. A Level 9 shooter. Eastern Cloud's got herself a symbol of power alright."

Xuan Ning did not know how to respond to that either.

Mei Wu turned to Ye Chong and Sha Ya. "These your friends?"

"Yes. This is Ye Chong, Master weaponsmith. This is Sha Ya, a Level 8 shooter."

"Oh, a weaponsmith." Mei Wu studied him with interest. "Do you make laser guns? I need a new one. This one's too old for me."

"A laser gun," Ye Chong considered, "That can be done, but what do you have to trade for it?"

Xuan Ning was alarmed by his words. He quickly interfered, "Just get the laser gun. We'll pay for it." "Really, this guy offends people so easily," Xuan Ning cursed Ye Chong inside.

Mei Wu raised an eyebrow. "I will pay for my own things, thank you very much." She turned back to Ye Chong and said, "What do you want? Money's out of the question. I haven't left Darkniss in a long while."

"You – You've been staying in Darkniss all this while?" Xuan Ning was shocked.

Mei Wu replied nonchalantly, "Why, yes, is that a problem? By the way, do any of you have energy crystals with you? Mine's almost used up. There is no way recharge energy crystals here, and going outside is too much of a hassle."

Xuan Ning shuddered as his mind caught onto an idea. He asked

Mei Wu carefully, "Did you ... Did you also reach Level 9?"

"Yes, what about it? Are you the only one allowed to do that?" Mei Wu threw a side glance at Xuan Ning with an unreadable expression. Sha Ya looked surprised. She had met another Level 9 shooter!

Xuan Ning looked overjoyed. He asked excitedly, "When – when did you reach Level 9?"

"Don't remember, it's been awhile." Mei Wu cut him short and turned to Ye Chong. "You haven't said what you want."

Ye Chong considered for a moment. "You must be familiar with Darkniss, having lived here for so long, right?"

"Just so so. I didn't venture too deep inside. The animals there are too strong for me. Besides, I don't have a suitable weapon," Mei Wu explained frankly.

"I need you to be our guide. Take us on a tour to the places you're familiar with. In return, I'll make you a laser gun, and throw in some energy crystals into the deal too. What do you say?" Ye Chong asked.

"Deal," Mei Wu agreed happily.

Ye Chong had a few laser guns with him. He had wanted to use them for trading at the weapons design contest. However, he did not find anything interesting there except for the rubbery germ. Hence, he stored all the laser guns in Celest's dimension keystone. Ye Chong went back into the Spider and pretended to search in the storage room. He then withdrew a laser gun from the dimension keystone. Sha Ya and Xuan Ning did not know what was in the storage room of the Spider, which was why they did not suspect anything was wrong.

Mei Wu took the laser gun from Ye Chong and examined it. Her eyes lit up in approval. "Nice one!" It was an honest compliment, but her voice was still uncomfortable to listen to.

Ye Chong considered that particular laser gun to be only average, but Mei Wu thought it was an excellent model, and loved it immediately. It was fortunate that she did not see Sha Ya's laser gun. Hers was even better.

"Did you build this huge spider?" Mei Wu looked at Ye Chong from head to toe with admiration. "As expected of a Master weaponsmith. Not bad, not bad at all." She suddenly remembered something, and looked curiously to Xuan Ning. "I seem to remember you have your own duties. Why would the King allow you to come here?"

Xuan Ning explained, "His Majesty has reached an agreement with Ye Chong. I'm here to assist him."

Mei Wu smiled coldly. "He's still the same as before. He'll use anything he can get his hands on." She turned back to Ye Chong and relaxed a little. "Are you looking for raw materials? I remember weaponsmiths are fond of gravstones. Let me show you this one place I've been to."

Chapter 562: Mei Wu

Ye Chong's group travelled with more confidence, with Mei Wu as their guide. Mei Wu was familiar with the area. This was obvious from the way she led the group. She was also generous with compliments about the huge spider that Ye Chong built.

Xuan Ning decided to inform the King of Mei Wu's whereabouts once they left Darkniss. As for the complicated relationship between Mei Wu and the King, it was not his place as a mere government servant to get involved.

Mei Wu was not aware that her two students were suffering under Ye Chong. Sha Ya and Xuan Ning knew, of course, but they were not foolish enough to bring up the topic. This powerful shooter was known for her unpredictable temper. It was not difficult to imagine her just shooting them all if she found out.

Mei Wu had been living in Darkniss for years. Aside from the annual trip to the world outside to resupply, such as getting energy crystals, she spent the rest of her time within the darkness of Darkniss. It would be much easier for her to go outside with the huge spider as transport.

Mei Wu had a pale complexion, for she had long since been exposed to sunlight.

She was a tenacious woman who survived the loneliness and dangers that lurked in the shades of Darkniss. That itself made her impressive.

Mei Wu treated Xuan Ning badly. She was also not interested in Sha Ya. A Level 8 shooter could not interest a shooter like her, who had passed the Level 9 mark. Ye Chong, however, was something else. Mei Wu had a bad temper, but she was also cunning. There was no reason to offend the Master weaponsmith whom she wanted something from.

She wanted the Spider. The Desert had sandstorms, while the Mist was a stretch of suffocating foliage. Aircrafts were useless in these environments, but the Spider could easily traverse through them. This was very useful for Mei Wu.

Darkniss was rich with minerals, but there was not even the slightest bit of energy crystals in this place. Mei Wu could tolerate having mediocre weapons, but she could not live without energy crystals. Every trip to the outside world for energy crystals was a great hassle for her. If she had the spider, she could bring more energy crystals with her in every trip, enough to last her a long time.

"It's here. This place has plenty of gravstones compared to its surroundings. I found it while hunting a horned tyrasaurs a few years ago." Mei Wu pointed towards a wide clearing.

Ye Chong was flabbergasted.

The place was once a lake, but now that the water had all dried up, what was left behind was a shallow impression in the ground that was the bottom of the lake. There were all kinds dazzling and colorful minerals in the soil, scattered about the clearing. They shined with a metallic luster than was absent in the other gravstones Ye Chong had seen along his journey in Darkniss, perhaps because they were cleansed by lake water long ago.

The entire clearing was about five or six square kilometres wide. There were palm sized gravstones everywhere in this clearing.

It was incredible! Ye Chong estimated no less than two dozen rare minerals in this wide clearing. Just a tiny bit of the rare minerals would greatly improve the properties of normal metal alloys. That was why the rare minerals were valuable. The rare mineral ores here were enough for him to extract a significant amount of rare minerals. They could be used to strengthen alloy structures, or improve alloy resilience, or improve their heat capacities ...

Ye Chong decided very quickly that this was an important place.

He immediately made a mark on his 3D holographic map. Mei Wu had never seen a map like that before, but she kept her curiosity in check to maintain her impersonal image.

However, she could tell from Ye Chong's reaction that the man valued this place. She was secretly pleased by it. She knew from their first round of negotiation that Ye Chong was a practical man. The best to deal with people like him was to make solid offers.

Now that she knew what Ye Chong was interested in, she could better plan her next moves. There were a few others like this that she knew about, and they would give her enough leverage. The fact soothed her. She had also never seen such a detailed map like the one on the Spider. She respected Ye Chong even more because of it. She did not feel any parapsychic waves from Ye Chong, but she also knew that a Level 9 shooter could never build a weapon as good as a Master weaponsmith.

Ye Chong made detailed markings in his map whenever they arrived at a new place. The map recorded every spot they had been in Darkniss, including the local distribution of plants and wild animals. With this map, his next visit to Darkniss would be much easier.

When Ye Chong was finished, Mei Wu slowly asked, "Well? Are you satisfied?" All the coldness vanished from Mei Wu as she asked with an alluring smile. Sha Ya felt her heart skip a beat, then berated herself for it. She thought to herself, "What a beauty! She didn't look like she was in her thirties at all." Xuan Ning thought to himself, "No wonder His Majesty still misses her."

Nevertheless, Ye Chong was immune to her expression. He could not understand the expression at all, much less respond to it.

On the other hand, he did understand what Mei Wu was trying to say. "Yes. Do you know any other places like this? What do you want in exchange?" Ye Chong asked calmly. Mu and Shang had taught him repeatedly about the rule of equal trade. Of course,

most of the time, it was only appropriate to be used on people on the same level as him. Fortunately, Mei Wu was one of those people.

"I know of three more," Mei Wu said as she reverted back to her cold attitude. However, her eyes betrayed her satisfaction with their negotiation method. It was much easier to deal with smart people. "I want a Spider."

Ye Chong expected that much. He considered it for a moment and said, "I can't give you this one, since we need it to leave Darkniss. If you want it, you'll have to wait until I enter Darkniss next time."

"Alright," Mei Wu agreed eagerly, and followed up with a question, "I don't understand, why are you interested in Darkniss? Is it the gravstones?"

Ye Chong nodded, then shook his head. "It's not just the gravstones. You're familiar with this place. Have you ever seen an animal that's about 10 metres tall, with a red-tipped arrow tail?"

Xuan Ning knew immediately what Ye Chong was talking about. He stared at Ye Chong and asked, "So you're interested in that? Why didn't you tell me sooner? Just say the word, and His Majesty will give it to you."

Mei Wu spoke up sharply, "Don't mention the b*stard Majesty in front of me again, Xuan Ning, or I'll put a hole in your head! Humph, I'm still way ahead of you as a shooter." Mei Wu lifted her chin and stared down arrogantly at Xuan Ning.

Xuan Ning felt himself showered in cold sweat. He quickly bowed his head and nodded, "Of course, of course!" Sha Ya stared at him. Who would have thought that the infamous Xuan Ning would cower before a woman just like that? And what was Mei Wu's relationship with the King?

Mei Wu breathed heavily with her right hand on her chest, and

recovered after a while. She closed her eyes and inhaled deeply and gathered herself. She shook her head at Ye Chong and said, "I have never seen that creature you speak of. However, if you're talking about an animal that size, you will probably need to go deeper into Darkniss."

"Have you seen this before?" Ye Chong took out the colloid fungus. Sha Ya and Xuan Ning studied the thing in Ye Chong's hand. They did not actually know why Ye Chong wanted to visit Darkniss. They also did not recognize the thing in his hand.

Mei Wu took the colloid fungus in her hand and scrutinized it. Abruptly, she lost her composure. "Why do you have this?"

"You recognize it?" Ye Chong kept his gaze on Mei Wu.

Mei Wu nodded with a trace of fear in her eyes. "Once, I was chased by three slitherlizards. I couldn't throw them off my back, and so I decided to run further into Darkniss out of desperation. Fortunately, I did not encounter any other wild animals along the way. I ran and ran for a long time, it must have been at least three weeks. It was then that I came across a meadow. The entire field was covered with this kind of fungus that you have. I was exhausted by then, and at my limit of parapsychic control. I thought that was it for me. When I saw the field, I simply slumped onto it. Once I was on the ground, I didn't have the strength to get up again. I closed my eyes, waiting for the end, but to my great surprise ..."

All three of her listeners keenly followed her words.

"The three slitherlizards left, just like that. I didn't think much about it back then. I was too tired, my eyes won't open. I fell unconscious. After some time, I woke up and saw a red patch underneath me. I was so shocked I quickly shot up from the ground.

"It was so quiet in the field. There wasn't a single sound. The long hairs of the plant swayed in the wind. I looked closer and realized

that it was not grass at all, but a kind of thin, hair-like plant. I call that place the Sea of Threads. I didn't see other animals in the Sea of Threads. I was scared of what I found, but then something else happened that made me truly afraid. Out there, I couldn't spread my parapsychic waves!"

"What?"

"Impossible!"

Sha Ya and Xuan Ning gasped.

"I was horrified! I never experienced that before. Never! A shooter without parapsychic waves cannot defend themselves. I ran away from the Sea of Threads without delay." Mei Wu smiled bitterly. "I wasn't so lucky on the return trip. I encountered many powerful creatures along the way. It was a dangerous trip, and I was badly injured from it, but in the end I got back home, alive. That was the most horrifying experience I ever had."

Mei Wu could still recall the horror she felt from that incident. Beside her, the three listeners were chilled by her story as well.

Chapter 563: Return

"How do I get to the Sea of Threads?" Ye Chong asked. He would be able to understand better by going there himself. However, Ye Chong believed that Mei Wu was being truthful. That she could not use parapsychic waves in the Sea of Threads was a fact that matched what he knew about the colloid germ. Perhaps the three slitherlizards had left because they could not sense Mei Wu's presence.

Mei Wu looked at Ye Chong in surprise. "You want to go there?" She was baffled. "Why are you so interested in the Sea of Threads?" Sha Ya and Xuan Ning both looked at Ye Chong with surprise as well. They were curious why he would brave the dangers to see that place.

Ye Chong did not answer, but continued to look at Mei Wu.

Mei Wu saw the determination in his eyes, but still she shook her head "We're too weak to do that now. Do you know how strong the wild animals are along the way? I was lucky last time, avoiding all their territories. The return trip was horrible. Besides, I don't remember the way."

"There are four of us, and there's the Spider. Aren't we enough?" Xuan Ning asked, sceptical. They were two Level 9 shooters, one Level 8 shooter and a Master weaponsmith. It was a powerful and exclusive combination.

Mei Wu tossed a look of ridicule at Xuan Ning. "Just because you're a Level 9 shooter, do you think you can go anywhere? Humph, without this huge spider, you wouldn't have made it here. A Level 9 shooter like you who are so up about himself despite not honing his skills is no better than a Level 8 shooter."

Xuan Ning's cheeks flushed. He knew that Mei Wu was right. They were both Level 9 shooters, but Mei Wu was far more powerful than him.

Mei Wu looked at Ye Chong and said firmly, "Even if we are two times stronger than we are now, it's still impossible. I know the strength of those creatures."

It seemed that the matter will have to wait. Barging further into Darkniss on impulse was too dangerous. Ye Chong can be patient when it mattered. He remembered about the three snowshade leopards, about how strong those animals were. He asked, "We saw three snowshade leopards a few days ago. Are there any of them nearby?"

"Snowshade leopards?" Mei Wu looked surprised. "You saw snowshade leopards?"

Xuan Ning described their encounter with the animals to her. Mei Wu considered the incident and muttered to herself, "You killed three snowshade leopards, in part due to having the huge spider, and also due to Ye Chong's unpredictable poison attack. There was also a geographical advantage, with the Raging River in the way. Without these conditions ..." Mei Wu did not finish her sentence. She just looked at the three of them quietly.

A win was a win. That was how Ye Chong saw it, unlike what Mei Wu and the two shooters thought. The shooters felt that the Spider was only an accessory, not a person's own battle ability. That was why Mei Wu chose to train herself in this dangerous place, all alone. Ye Chong admired her resolution. After all, this kind of training required tremendous courage. However, Ye Chong believed that anything that could help him win was also part of himself. This was a difference in perception.

Xuan Ning and Sha Ya lowered their heads and heeded the stronger shooter, Mei Wu's words. Ye Chong was unmoved by her conclusion. He asked calmly, "Where do the snowshade leopards live?" If the animals lived nearby, he could never have a base here. The creatures were too strong. His base would be torn down as soon as he built a new one.

"I don't know," Mei Wu answered, shaking her head. "I never saw any snowshade leopards nearby. They must live further inside Darkniss. Where did you see them?"

"Near the entrance of Darkniss."

"That's not possible!" Mei Wu looked unsettled. "Snowshade leopards live only in the inner parts of the Darkniss, perhaps even further in than the Sea of Threads. I've never encountered creatures as strong as the snowshade leopard."

Ye Chong asked, "I heard that the animals in Darkniss stay within their territories, and will not move about freely. Having stayed here for so long, do you think that's the case?"

Mei Wu nodded solemnly. "People do say that. The wild animals in Darkniss often have a clear territory of their own, and will seldom go beyond their boundaries. There are exceptions, though, like when the three slitherlizards were chasing me. It rarely happens, and that was my only experience with it. If you really met snowshade leopards, they must have been chased by other creatures, or chasing something."

Ye Chong and his two companions considered her words.

Mei Wu paused, and then added, "There is another possibility ..."

The three of them looked at up her. Mei Wu hesitated before saying, "It's possible that something strange is happening in Darkniss."

Mei Wu saw the puzzled look in her listeners, and explained, "Darkniss has always been a stable place. However, it is also constantly changing. I have lived here for years, and felt it, but I can't exactly describe the nature of this change."

Ye Chong and his companions thought about what Mei Wu said. Personally, Ye Chong was more inclined to believe in the third scenario. If it was only the snowshade leopards that were the anomaly, then the first two scenarios were more plausible.

However, since the country of Western Frost had found a red-tailed beast in Darkniss ... Ye Chong considered both events together, and felt that the third scenario was more likely.

It seemed that they would not be solving this mystery anytime soon. Mei Wu brought Ye Chong to the other three lake beds. There were so many rare mineral ores there Ye Chong wanted to just harvest them all and bring them home. However, that was an impractical wish. The Spider had limited storage, and it was unwise to use Celest's dimension keystone in front of these three shooters. Besides, these rare minerals were not particularly useful without normal alloys.

Ye Chong decided to build a base in Darkniss no matter what. However, he would have to think about exactly how he was going to achieve that.

Ye Chong made detailed markings on his map for these three locations.

When the Spider brought all four of them to Mei Wu's place, Xuan Ning took one look at it and felt like crying. "You ... You've been staying here all these years?"

It was a cave, fitted with some simple furniture made of rocks. The ground was covered with a thin and soft layer of brownish grass. It was very bare. The only things that suggested this was a human's house were the artificial lights in the cave and a food heater. These were the most basic appliances in a normal house. The light and heater both ran on energy crystals, but they consumed energy at a very low rate. The heater would not attract wild animals since it did not generate fire when operating. Just a small distance away from the cave was a source of spring water.

Even the poor people of Eastern Cloud lived in better conditions than this. The thought of Mei Wu living in this cave by herself all this while, isolated from society, and having to hunt for her own food, made Xuan Ning's heart ache for her.

When Sun Sieha was a young man, he liked to travel around the world. Xuan Ning was his guard back then. He knew all about His Majesty's relationship with Mei Wu. As the three of them travelled around together, Xuan Ning came to think of Mei Wu as the King's rightful partner. Later on, Sun Sieha and Mei Wu got into a quarrel, and Mei Wu abruptly left him. Mei Wu was being childish back then, but still mild compared to her solitary and unpredictable nature right now. Ever since that incident, His Majesty's character changed. He turned colder and apathetic. The King never had a partner after that, and many of the government officials worried about it.

Xuan Ning had thought that Mei Wu would surely become the Queen of Eastern Cloud. Hence, seeing Mei Wu living like this in Darkniss brought tears to his eyes.

Mei Wu seemed to read his thoughts. She softened a little and said, "Life is alright here. The dangerous and harsh training that I went through all these years made me improve so quickly you can't imagine it." She paused, and then continued, "You just reached Level 9. You don't know what it's like to be Level 9 yet. You know too little about parapsychic control. Living in Su City, you will never achieve Level 10. Others have taken the path I chose now. Don't waste your time persuading me. I will not leave here until I reach Level 10."

Xuan Ning assented quietly to her wishes. He knew how obstinate and extreme Mei Wu can be. There was nothing he could say to change her mind.

Ye Chong was not interested in the history between Mei Wu and Sun Sieha. He took out half of the energy crystals stored in the Spider and gave them to Mei Wu. Life in Darkniss was much better than Ye Chong's life on the trash planet, and still better than the Sang Tribe's life in Archipelago. Before the Sang Tribe met Ye Chong, they did not even have metals, much less advanced weapons like laser guns.

That night, Ye Chong and his group stayed in the cave. In actual fact, it was impossible to tell day from night in Darkniss, as the sky was always dark in here. On the second day, Mei Wu led them in the Spider to continue their exploration of Darkniss.

The whole exploration took 25 days, as Mei Wu was familiar with a huge part of Darkniss. Sometimes, they encountered wild animals on their way. It was then that the three outsiders experienced exactly how strong Mei Wu was.

Her strength was not only expressed in her shooting skills. It was hard to imagine a shooter climbing 30 metres up a smooth cliff. In addition, she moved with great agility. Ye Chong thought she was fit enough to learn proper combat. He also thought her parapsychic control was far superior compared to Xuan Ning. She could also restrict her opponents with her parapsychic waves, much like how mentalists restrict their opponent's movement. Her parapsychic waves were much stronger than Xuan Ning's, but they could cover a wider area. She also used her parapsychic waves in many extraordinary ways. Xuan Ning and Sha Ya could only watch in fascination.

Xuan Ning could see that he would never reach Level 10, unless he left everything behind and dedicate himself only to being a shooter, just like Mei Wu. Without doing this, Level 10 would forever be out of reach.

Ye Chong said to Mei Wu, "The next time I enter Darkniss, I'll bring you the Spider."

"Alright." Mei Wu looked assured. She believed that Ye Chong would not lie to her. "You should leave now. I'm going out to hunt." Mei Wu nodded to the three of them and turned to lead the way, vanishing quickly into the darkness.

Xuan Ning watched her retreating figure with mixed emotions. He wanted to say something, but could not find the words. "His Majesty should decide on this," Xuan Ning sighed inside.

Thus, Ye Chong's trip into Darkniss concluded. He was quite happy with the outcome.

His experience at the entrance to Darkniss told him that Celest's dimension keystone had an effect on spatial windows. He also collected tissue samples of the snowshade leopard. There were many more other specimens in the storage room. He had drawn a detailed map of one part of Darkniss, including the locations of the minerals. There was also a clue to the colloid germ – the Sea of Threads.

For a single investigative trip into Darkniss, he had learned far more than he expected.

Ye Chong and his companions left Darkniss without delay. The road back was much smoother. Mei Wu had marked the general territorial boundaries of the wild animals on their map. Hence, Ye Chong and his group made their way out of Darkniss with relative ease.

The path that their Spider cleared out in the Mist was still there. The plants here grew quickly, but not quickly enough to cover the path. They had no incident in the Desert as well. There were no sandstorms, and the sandscorpions were pretty much wiped out by Ye Chong. The trip was smooth, but Xuan Ning, who should have appreciated this rapid travelling the most, looked occupied with his thoughts throughout the journey. Ye Chong and Sha Ya were not the talkative type, and so the trip back was largely completely without conversation.

Once they arrived at Yedda, a transport aircraft was there for them. They took the aircraft back to Su City.

Ye Chong began to organize the results of their expedition. There was a lot of complicated information to sort through, and none of them immediately applicable.

"Sigh, there's so much to be done," Ye Chong sighed to himself as he thought of the huge pile of specimens waiting for him. He felt

daunted but fulfilled.

Chapter 564: Mech Pilot Training Program

Ye Chong got busy with his work again, but it was not as though he had ever been idle.

First signs of success in the students' training were now apparent. Three months was a long time. With the hellish training designed for them and special medication that Ye Chong prepared with alchemy, the students improved at an astonishing rate. Now, they no longer looked as fragile as they were a few months ago. No one dared to slack when the vicious Liao San was in charge. Everyone was pushed to their very limits. For those who could not keep up, horrible consequences awaited them. Instructor Liao was notorious on his one-on-one extra classes.

Even Duan Qian, who was used to the realities of training, could not help but feel stricken whenever Liao San whipped his students. In these three months, Duan Qian improved the most. As a mostly self-taught person who had struggled to understand things by himself, he now had professional guidance. It was only natural for him to improve so quickly.

Besides Duan Qian, there was also another group of students who were improving quickly. These students had excellent physical qualities. Their talent in combat was revealed through the training program. The surprising thing was, almost a third of these students were from noble families. They lived in good conditions, much better than their poorer counterparts. However, they did not devote themselves to training before this, living a life of pleasure and idleness. Nevertheless, with Instructor Liao, all students were equal. They could only train hard like everyone else. Their physical advantages made a difference in the outcome.

Soon, Ye Chong picked out these students to undergo a whole new set of training. The other students watched jealously at the selected students, while the ones who were chosen puffed up their chests with pride.

To Ye Chong's surprise, Shu Mo'er and her sister were also amongst these fast improving students. They had improved so quickly that even their instructor in charge, Gui Gui, would occasionally compliment them. Ye Chong had no bias against the sisters. Here, the only that mattered was one's true abilities.

The students that he selected came up to five thousand, which was the number that Ye Chong had agreed upon with Sun Sieha. Ye Chong cleared up a space for their training ground in his manor. Duan Qian would be in charge of general training, while Liao San as assistant. All the students groaned when they saw Liao San there. They had thought that they could escape Liao San's grasp, but Ye Chong had assigned the instructor to them again.

The training routine for the students changed drastically. Physical training was still an important part of the routine, but Ye Chong had also introduce the steel beads training that he had the most trouble with to them. Ye Chong did not have steel beads, so he had to make metal beads with the rare metals found in Darkniss.

If anyone from He Yue Galaxy or the Five Galaxies saw this, they would be shocked! What a waste of heavenly resources! On the wide training ground, five thousand students sat and pushed around colorful metal beads on a wooden board in front of them. These metal beads were all made from rare metals!

After setting aside a very small amount of these metals for analysis, Ye Chong used up all the metals he brought back to make the metal beads. It was just enough for the five thousand students. After all, the Spider's storage room was nearly full with the mineral ores.

The students were clumsy at first, but Ye Chong did not worry about that. He had also taken a long time to get used to the training.

The training program started in full force. Sun Sieha never came

to bother him again. It was a wonderful life!

Ye Chong dived straight into his research. There were so many things he needed to study, but even so, he would take time to train with Celest every single day.

His underground base was mostly completed, and his five laboratories were done. Additionally, Ye Chong had built a mech training ground for his own use.

He had begun growing snowshade leopard tissue, but in order to use them to upgrade Celest, he would have to be familiar with the bio-mech's structure. Celest was the product of the Research Consortium's most advanced technologies, and probably had the most complicated structure. Even with the chips Kui gave him, it would not be easy to understand Celest's structure.

Ye Chong devoted all his attention to research.

In this world, nothing beats dedication. Ye Chong was a man of dedication.

Nevertheless, the scale of his work was far larger than he expected. He did not expect it to take him six months to replace Celest's tissue with that of the snowshade leopard. Of these six months, five of them were spent on studying and research. The actual upgrade happened in the last month.

Armed with snowshade leopard tissue, Celest was now more powerful than Ye Chong could ever imagine. He was already impressed with the explosive strength of the bio-mech's original form. After the upgrade, Celest's strength almost doubled. How much power was that exactly? Ye Chong was not sure. He only knew that piloting the upgraded Celest would be a strain on even his own strong body. Celest also had its engine tweaked. Wood from this world had great compatibility with pure energy and low density, making it suitable for building an engine. Ye Chong picked the best wood he could find, even though the price was shockingly high. The wood itself had cost 50 million ao.

It looked like he would have to train himself further! He must be able to unleash the full potential of Celest.

Ye Chong gained something else from his intense research work. Each day, he immersed himself in the most advanced biological theories and experiments. This improved his understanding in the field greatly. He was now able to build his own photon processor. Of course, the photon processor he made was not comparable to Celest's, but it was at least an average level photon processor, which was good enough for him.

After hiding in his underground base for six months, Ye Chong emerged to find Xi Yan waiting for him.

Xi Yan quickly approached him. "Teacher, Sir Xuan Ning had dropped by three times when you were gone."

"Did he say anything?" Ye Chong asked. He recalled abruptly that he had promised the man a Spider.

Xi Yan shook his head. "He only asked when you'd be coming out, then he would leave."

Ye Chong nodded. "Alright. Xi Yan, get Kristen and make two sets of mechanical parts for the Spider." One for Xuan Ning and another for Mei Wu – he might as well build them at the same time.

Xi Yan nodded. "Okay." Recently, Xi Yan felt like as though he had been reborn. His teacher had taught him not only about weapons, but also machinery in general, and it opened his eyes on things. Once upon a time, he only knew how to build weapons, but not the logic behind the building process. With his teacher's guidance, he could now see things clearer than ever.

He was thoroughly impressed with Ye Chong.

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Ye Chong went to the training ground, and found the atmosphere there thick with concentration.

Ping ping ping! Metal beads hit against each other, sounding like a thunderstorm. Every student focused on the wooden board before them as they flick about the metal beads on the board, quickly and deftly. Not one of them noticed that Ye Chong had arrived. Liao San was circling around the students, keeping a tight watch over them.

For normal students, the metal beads training did not only improve their hand speed, but also their reflex. Many of them could barely stand six months of this dry form of training. However, Liao San said that the king had ordered for anyone who failed to go through the training to be sent to labor camp. Once the announcement was made, no one thought of giving up again.

The fact was, human had infinite potential. Even students with only average talent were forced to their current level of expertise due to the intense training they underwent.

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Sun Sieha wondered how the students would turn out at the end of Ye Chong's training. That was why he gave that harsh order, to prevent the slippery ones to escape training. His Majesty's words were final, this was common knowledge. No one doubted if the order would actually be carried out. Hence, they pushed themselves to keep up with their training. There were many rumours of people never returning from labour camps.

Sun Sieha was also very busy lately. His men had finally digested and understood the technology in the cannon arrays that Ye Chong built for him. The problem now was how to mass produce the weapon. Even though Master Karu finally knew how to build the weapon from scratch, Sun Sieha knew that Ye Chong had already taken so much money from him by now.

He did not feel good about that at all!

Nevertheless, he had no time to think about Ye Chong. Right now, he must focus on the cannon arrays. The military had

concluded that if they could be armed with the cannon arrays on a large scale, their overall battle capacity would be at least doubled. Their battle strategies would also be modified to incorporate the cannon arrays.

Almost all the military factories were ordered to produce the cannon arrays. Sun Sieha waited patiently for the relatively low cost but very powerful cannon arrays to be fully incorporated into the military. There was also the technology they had bought from Kristen to inject into Eastern Cloud's military.

Once these changes were incorporated into Eastern Cloud, their military would become the strongest in recorded history. What more could demand Sun Sieha's attention so much? His ambition was fuelled by the endless possibilities! Ye Chong's role in this important matter also drew the attention of spies from other countries. They began to show up more frequently around his isolated manor.

It was not a problem for Ye Chong to worry, however. Sun Sieha waved his hand, and the land around the manor was declared as military property. Unrelated personnel were not allowed to trespass. Every morning, royal guards who worked directly for the King would bury a few bodies on the land. This was a routine mission for them.

Ye Chong ignored all of these. It was not related to him anyway. He did not care if Eastern Cloud had the strength to wipe out other countries. He did not need so many people on his side for now. Besides, soldiers who did not pass the basic requirements were only a drag on the army's overall strength. The five thousand soldiers he had under him right now were far from passing the basic requirements.

Ye Chong estimated another three months was needed for the hand speed training for the students to satisfy his minimum requirement. Their physical stamina was good enough now, after their vigorous training. However, Ye Chong still made physical

training a part of their schedule every day. In fact, physical training was the goal of all their training sections. Physical fitness was a necessity for mech pilots.

Ye Chong did not expect much from his students in terms of hand speed – he would be happy as long as they could reach Mach 5. When Ye Chong demonstrated his maximum hand speed, all the students were stunned.

They could not see the metal beads at all. They were only shadows, like Ye Chong's hands. The sound of metal beads colliding against each other sounded like a stampede. Even Liao San swallowed with difficulty as he watched Ye Chong's demonstration. It was when Ye Chong declared the minimum requirement for them that the students heaved a sigh of relief.

Those who passed the hand speed requirement would begin another training set. However, only three students passed so far. They were Duan Qian and the Shu sisters.

The three of them were each given a strange keyboard, with keys arranged neatly on it. If any mech pilots were around, they would recognize it as the control console in a mech. The keys were arranged exactly as it would be in a normal mech. They were also given a list of complicated key sequences. Ye Chong's task for them was to memorize all the sequences and type all of them as fast as possible. To pass, they must type at least 90 key sequences of Level 3 difficulty in one minute; typing 120 key sequences would be considered outstanding.

The keyboard's design was simple. Ye Chong placed an order of five thousand identical keyboards from a random manufacturer.

If he wanted to cultivate five thousand mech pilots, he would need five thousand mechs.

Five thousand mechs were a lot, no matter how one looked at it. The raw materials required were staggering, and the actual manufacturing part was time and energy consuming. There was

the photon processor, holographic scanning system, engine ... Too much technology were involved!

The typing training for these three students would be all for nothing if they did not have mechs.

It was a serious issue, but Ye Chong did not lose his cool because of it.

If he had enough metal, the problem would not be so dire. Ye Chong had the best equipment with him. Automating some of the manufacturing process should not be difficult. However, in order to obtain metal, he would have to enter Darkniss.

To enter Darkniss, one must be strong enough. To be strong enough, these students must become mech pilots. To become mech pilots, these students must have mechs.

It was a chicken-and-egg problem.

What if he used wood to build the mechs? The wooden material he found here had excellent physical properties, but they were not suitable for building complex structures, like mech parts.

It seemed that he would have to come up with an alternative for his students as a temporary solution. Ye Chong quickly found a compromise. Designing machines for combat was not a challenge for him.

Ye Chong dismissed the option of fighter aircrafts. Aircrafts could not change direction as easily as he liked, and they were impractical in outer space. The most important things for his students to learn were how to manage the force that came from high speed turns, how to lock onto their enemies, how to shoot, and how to coordinate as a team.

In short, his new machine must be able to move with great flexibility and fitted with a photon processor, a holographic scanning system, long range shooting weapons, and a safety system.

Not long after he breached in fresh air again, Ye Chong returned to his underground base. Three days later, he returned outside with a detailed schematic.

This time, his assistant was Xi Yan. When Xi Yan saw the schematic, he was dumbfounded.

"Teacher, what is this?"

It was a spherical machine, about six metres in diameter. Two straight belts crossed over each other on the surface of the machine. The belts were just shy of a metre in width, and had 16 holes evenly perforated in each of them.

"It's a training vehicle. Your task is to simplify its structure. This is to improve its stability. Understand?" Ye Chong asked Xi Yan. He had picked Xi Yan because he was more experienced than Kristen.

"I understand." Xi Yan nodded absently as he stared at the schematic.

Ye Chong gestured with a wave. "Alright, off you go." He then left the dumbfounded Xi Yan to tend to other matters.

A day later, Xi Yan visited Ye Chong.

Ye Chong studied his schematic and nodded, satisfied. He made some minor tweaks as he said, "Good work. Hmm, the structure is simplified by a lot. How much will it cost to build this thing?"

Xi Yan did not understand the logic behind this training vehicle. The structure was not suitable for flight. It was not aerodynamic, unlike an aircraft. Besides, it had a higher drag than aircrafts, and would fly much slower. The only good thing about the vehicle was its great flexibility in changing directions. The two belts that on the sphere had 16 engine exhaust expellers that could make the machine travel unpredictable trajectories.

What was the cost of this machine? Xi Yan had to pause and consider the question. "What material are you using?"

"Hanatsubaki wood." Ye Chong's reply came instantly.

Xi Yan paused again. Hanatsubaki wood was the cheapest wooden material round. He replied frankly, "If it's Hanatsubaki wood, we can build one for about three thousand ao."

"I see. Find a manufacturer to build five thousand of these. That will be 15 million ao."

"What about the engine?" Xi Yan asked.

"Use the LLK-1 model. I remember that each costs about a thousand ao," Ye Chong said.

Xi Yan knew the numbers. "We get discounts for bulk buying. Five thousand of them will cost around four million ao." He could understand his teacher's reasoning. The LLK-1 was a very old model. There was no reason for anyone to buy the engine, except that it was cheap.

However, training five thousand people was not easy. Just the training vehicle would cost him close to 20 million ao. If he wanted to build aircrafts for his students, he would only be able to pay for less than a thousand of them.

There were also the photon processor and holographic scanning system to consider. He should not forget the safety system too. Ye Chong would not want the students he had trained with so much effort to lose their lives because of inadequate fittings in their training vehicles.

It was all too much!

All three components required Ye Chong's personal attention and effort. It was so much work that Ye Chong felt like he was pushing his limits.

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Down in the underground base, in his alchemy lab, were many culture containers. Ye Chong needed five thousand bio-mechs for

his five thousand students. Fortunately, a bio-photon processor was not too different from its mechanical counterpart, or Ye Chong would have to work himself to death trying to figure it out. Even so, growing the cultures was a challenge. It was a magnificent view, to see five thousand culture containers all placed in the same lab.

Building the holographic scanning systems was even more exhausting. Without familiar metals to work with, he had to use native raw materials. Fortunately, Ye Chong had already run an analysis on all common materials for their properties, or the job would have been impossible. To save time, he had created a simplified version of the holographic scanning system. Even so, he could only make a hundred of them every day. It will take two months for him to build enough for his entire army. This was the simplest holographic scanning system found in Kui's chips.

With some calculations, Ye Chong knew that he could not finish the safety systems himself. Hence, he went to Sun Sieha. Naturally, His Majesty was more than willing to help him. He immediately called for Master Karu.

Master Karu studied the schematics with barely suppressed excitement, and asked to buy the rights for it without hesitation. Of course, Ye Chong would still earn royalties, and Sun Sieha would have to build five thousand sets of them for Ye Chong, free of charge, as part of the contract. Both Sun Sieha and Master Karu were prepared for Ye Chong's nasty contracts, but they knew how important the technology was, and so had agreed to the terms without argument.

With the five thousand sets of safety systems handled, and a long term source of income in his pocket, Ye Chong felt satisfied with his decision.

Now, it was his turn to do the hard work. Five thousand holographic scanning systems to go!

Chapter 565: Army of Glutinous Rice Balls

He might really die from this! Even though he chose the simplest form of holographic scanning system, building five thousand of them was really exhausting. However, since Xi Yan was there to help, he was able to finish making them ahead of schedule.

Just then, the five thousand training vehicles that Ye Chong ordered had arrived. Ye Chong had to expand the landing field area to accommodate all the training vehicles. Fortunately, his manor was large enough.

All five thousand training vehicles were neatly arranged on the landing field. As seen from above, they looked like a neat display of five thousand glutinous rice balls.

The training ground of the five thousand students was very close to the landing field. However, the students were all focused in their training, and did not think to look around them. By now, 60 percent of the students had passed the hand speed training, leaving only 40 percent of them to go. However, these students were very close to passing already. It would probably take only another week for them to join their other cohorts.

The students who passed were now learning about their very own keyboard models. The complicated key sequences were a headache. They did not know what they mean, but had to memorize them anyway. However, they were given no other choice but to forge ahead.

This was a test on memory power. The more intelligent students quickly stood out.

Ye Chong found that one of the students used only three days to memorize all the key sequences, and another three days to type 150 key sequences of difficulty Level 43.

Even Ye Chong was impressed by the student. Some talented

people would find themselves unnoticed by society until they were given the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. Then, they would shine more brightly than anyone else.

This student was obviously talented. Ye Chong would definitely pay special attention to him. The student was not Duan Qian or the prominent Shu sisters, but a young man who had only had average results in previous trainings. His name was Appilok, and he was singled out by Ye Chong from the other students.

He would receive even stricter training. Ye Chong would personally train him to become a qualified mech pilot.

Appilok's first hurdle was physical stamina. He had gone through the physical training all this while, but that was far from enough, the way Ye Chong saw it.

All the students were curious about the five thousand spherical machines laid out not far from their training ground. Even their instructor, Liao San, had his interest piqued. Ye Chong was officially known as a Master Weaponsmith, and those were obviously his latest creations. Liao San had been hoping to get one of Ye Chong's Spiders for a long time, but he knew he did not rank high enough in the government to request for one.

The five thousand training vehicles were a huge motivation for the students, especially when they found out they could have one for themselves if they passed the training of typing key sequences.

Moreover, once they knew that the training vehicles could fly, the students cheered out loudly with joy. All of them, except for Duan Qian and the Shu sisters, were only average people. They were trained in parapsychic control and hence, never flew an aircraft before. They had been envious of shooters for a long while, but now found themselves given the chance to fly as well.

Ye Chong could not sympathize with their emotions, but he could see that their morale was high. This surprised him, since the typing test was a very dry training. However, this was good news

for him. Of course he preferred that they stayed that way.

Ye Chong was dead tired after finishing all five thousand holographic scanning systems. Xi Yan was also exhausted. However, Ye Chong did not take a break. There were too many things that demanded his attention.

Getting used to the upgraded Celest was one of his main priorities. A child holding a heavy axe was more likely to injure himself than others. To Ye Chong, Celest was now like that heavy axe. It was a powerful tool, but he would need time to master it.

Appilok watched Ye Chong in quiet surprise. He was not even surprised this much when he was brought to the training ground in the manor's underground base. Ye Chong demonstrated the most basic combat moves, and would do so hours at a time, repeating the moves over and over again. It was hard to imagine a master in combat expert to spend so much time in basic training every day.

Appilok understood how fortunate he was and appreciated this opportunity given to him. He forced himself to go through the dull training every day. He reminded himself always to learn from Ye Chong.

Appilok was very talented, at least in the mind. Ye Chong felt that he was born to become a mech pilot. The young man had a calm mind and excellent memory. He was also committed and dedicated. The only thing he lacked was physical fitness. His body was not naturally suitable for combat. Ye Chong had trained him for a long while, and he had indeed become stronger, but still far from ideal. However, he displayed exceptional skills in other areas, especially in strategizing.

Appilok was more suited to become a long range mech pilot. However, Ye Chong did not have a long range mech. That would have to wait until he build a base in Darkniss.

With Ye Chong's personal teaching, Appilok improved much

faster than the other students. Even Duan Qian was envious of the special attention he was getting. Duan Qian was the second fastest improving student in the cohort. He had the best physical build compared to the other five thousand students. No one who worked hard enough to reach where he was would have a mediocre mind.

Duan Qian was the first to enter a training vehicle. When the spherical training vehicle alighted from the ground, everyone below watched him enviously. Suddenly, the training vehicle spiralled uncontrollably like a balloon losing its air, and landed heavily on the ground. When Duan Qian emerged dizzily from the machine, the training ground was silent, and then exploded in laughter.

More students began their practice in flying their training vehicles. When they entered their training vehicles and saw the control console looking exactly like their training keyboard, they finally realized what the key sequences were all about.

Being new to flying, they were not afraid to try out their training vehicles. Everywhere in the sky were wooden balls, flying around in different trajectories. Often, a training vehicle would go out of control and crash land into the ground. After a while, the training vehicle would begin its shaky ascent into the air once again.

Ye Chong was grateful to have installed the safety systems. If they were not in place, the students would have been crushed into meat patties when they crash landed from high above. Now, they would only feel dizzy in the aftermath.

The students who were up in the air were having fun, but the ones who were still down below and the royal guards stationed around the manor were in for trouble. With so many training vehicles crashing down unpredictably, anyone who found themselves in the way would die for sure. Hence, from the day Duan Qian began his flying training, the royal guards moved their camp 150 kilometres away. Together with them were the students that were not selected by Ye Chong. The students who were still

have not passed continued their training in Ye Chong's manor.

Liao San roared at them, "You little m*therf*ckers, hehe, if you don't buck up, get ready to be crushed! Hell, you ask me if there's a safer place? Haha, are you idiots? Can't you use that rusted brain of yours? It's the sky! That's right, the sky! If you don't wanna be hit, f*cking pass your training. The faster you get up there, the safer you are. Then you get to choose who you wanna crash into! Of course, whichever f*cker thinks of crashing into me, you know what happens to anyone who murders a General of the country!"

These students were scared to death, and moved their hands even more quickly. Ye Chong had thought they needed at least a week or two to pass their training, but in the end it only took them three days.

From this incident, Ye Chong also learned that a desperate situation was the most effective way to harness a person's full abilities.

Inspired by this realization, Ye Chong decided to incorporate this concept into the rest of the students' training program. If Shang were here, the mech would definitely be more ruthless than him.

Oh, Mu/Shang ...

Ye Chong suddenly felt his heart all warming up. He looked into the distance and gripped his hands together into tight fists.

Liao San came to report to Ye Chong. "Sir, I just received orders to leave for my original post."

Ye Chong was surprised. Liao San was a good instructor, He never questioned Ye Chong's training program, and would perform his tasks diligently. Without Liao San, Ye Chong would have to deal with the students personally. With his current jam packed schedule, that was hardly feasible.

Ye Chong frowned. "What happened?"

"His Majesty gave the order." Liao San explained in a serious

tone. "The conflict between Eastern Cloud and Western Frost has escalated recently. The border is now under a very real threat. War could happen at any moment now. As His Majesty's Royal Guards, we are bound by duty to protect the King."

Ye Chong understood the situation. He considered for a moment and nodded calmly. "Alright. All the best to you. Oh, by the way, bring Xuan Ning's Spider to him." It was no wonder that Xuan Ning did not have time to come for his Spider.

"Yes Sir!" Liao San bowed to Ye Chong and left.

After Liao San's departure, Ye Chong immediately made his way to the training ground. He felt a strong sense of urgency. War was imminent. With Eastern Cloud's military fitted with new weapons, they were now much stronger than ever. Sun Sieha had waited for this day for a long time. War would begin soon enough.

Once the battles started, the current peace would be broken. It would also be the best opportunity for Ye Chong to leave. Ye Chong knew that with Eastern Cloud's current strength, winning the war was a matter of time. When Eastern Cloud won the war against Western Frost and Ye Chong had not left by then, leaving would become much harder, especially when he was taking five thousand people with him.

The best time would be when Sun Sieha was focused on the war and not on him.

Ye Chong already knew where they would be headed for.

The students enjoyed their latest training program. It was much more interesting than typing meaningless key sequences in their keyboards. Besides, for many students, flying was the dream of their lives. After all, whether it was in Eastern Cloud, Western Frost or Northern Lands, only shooters were allowed to fly.

To these students, the training vehicles were like a miracle. The holographic system allowed even normal people to know what was

outside their line of sight. There was also the photon processor thing, which was equally fascinating. The training vehicle was slower than an aircraft, but more flexible in the air. It could even fly as close as five meters away from the ground.

That was what Ye Chong had asked from his students. They must learn how to fly in low altitudes. Every day, Ye Chong would lead his students flying in the air. Appilok's personal training had to stop. Now, he trained with the rest of the students.

The entire Su City found out about those strange aircrafts. People were shocked at first, but soon grew used to them. Rumours had it that the manufacturer who built Ye Chong's training vehicles received a lot of enquiries about those strange aircrafts.

The students flew further and further distances. Long distance flight practices became common. It was hard to say if it was more fascinating or funny to see a swarm of five thousand balls flying high up in the sky, but the sight left a deep impression in anyone who saw it.

The students would sometimes even venture out for thousands of kilometers, like an actual fleet of aircraft. This had alerted local authorities at first. However, once news of Master Ye Chong's weird aircraft spread across the entire Eastern Cloud country, the local military relaxed.

No one would raise a fuss about Master Ye Chong for something so inconsequential. Some of the soldiers even took the initiative to greet the students.

After this long period of training, the students flew better and could execute formations, at least in form. However, Ye Chong knew that the students were only still not capable of facing an actual battle. The only thing he was thankful for was that his students could shoot very well.

The military's recent new fittings also brought Ye Chong a fortune. Ye Chong prepared to buy new supplies, but found that

the government now had a tight hold on all resources due to the state of emergency in the country. Hence, Ye Chong went to Sun Sieha.

"What do you need so many things for?" Sun Sieha went through Ye Chong's very long list, dumbfounded.

Ye Chong replied calmly, "Refitting."

Sun Sieha realized then that Ye Chong wanted to make new gear for the five thousand students. No wonder he needed so much resources. He had heard of how people referred to Ye Chong's team as the Army of Glutinous Rice Balls, and laughed. "Alright, you can have them. However, you know that we are in a state of emergency right now. Everything will cost 20 percent more, agreed?" Ye Chong's fortune came mostly from Sun Sieha. Even the King was getting jealous of his wealth. How could the King possibly let go of this wonderful opportunity?

Ye Chong nodded without expression. "Agreed."

"Are you upgrading your Army of Glutinous Rice Balls to, well, an Army of Dumplings? Hehe!" Sun Sieha teased. Since the training vehicles were round, and flew slowly and even shakily in the sky, people nicknamed the group as the Army of Glutinous Rice Balls.

Ye Chong ignored him and left with the King's approval letter for his supplies.

Chapter 566: Leaving

Batches and batches of raw materials were sent to Ye Chong's manor. Even though they were sold 20 percent above market price, Ye Chong thought it was worth it. He spent most of his money on raw materials, especially the rare ones, and was always offered more than he needed. Sun Sieha's letter also helped him with the purchases.

In Su City, all the businessmen were also nobles. When they found out through their sources that the great Master Ye Chong was visiting, they all tried to curry his favour. Ye Chong responded to them coldly, but never stopped them from offering their services. This was a pleasant surprise for the businessmen. Building a relationship with this man of status was a wonderful opportunity!

No one asked him what the materials were used for. After all, it was common for weaponsmiths to store raw materials. Besides, Ye Chong had the King's approval. In the end, Ye Chong received more raw materials than he expected, and some of them did not even cost him a single ao. A few of the businessmen even gave him the transport aircraft that came with the materials.

Kristen gaped at the materials and asked, "Teacher, why you do buy so much of them?"

"They're useful." Ye Chong did not explain. The truth was, Kristen was a good student. She was talented and hardworking, and she improved quickly. More importantly, she was young. However, Ye Chong did not plan to bring her along. That had been decided early on.

His students' training continued without pause.

Ye Chong began to reorganize his five thousand students. He was no longer ignorant of military structures. He incorporated strict status rankings, rules, and practiced reward and punishment just

like in the military. Ye Chong was familiar with these concepts.

Ye Chong promoted students who performed well in their training to low ranking military officers. The effect was immediate. The five thousand students conducted themselves more professionally, no longer behaving as free and easy as they once did.

Here on the training ground, the five thousand students stood in formation, all standing straight and with a serious expression on their faces.

Ye Chong stood in front of them without emotion. The students were afraid of Ye Chong. Rumor had it that Master Ye Chong had the authority to form a five thousand strong security detachment. This was exciting news to him. To be able to serve someone as prominent as Master Ye Chong in Eastern Cloud was a great honor. From now on, their lives would be heavily influenced by Ye Chong. Anything that Ye Chong do in the future will directly affect the course of their future.

"From now on, you are my personal security detachment. Any of you who object to this, please step forward." Ye Chong spoke with a normal tone.

All the students could not hide the excitement on their faces, but tried they did as they stood even straighter. Today, the rumor was confirmed. Their future was secured.

Ye Chong's plain voice continued to reverberate in the air. "As my personal security detail, you will follow me wherever I go. You will leave behind your families, your homes. I'll allow you 10 minutes to reconsider."

No one moved. Ye Chong was not aware that leaving home was common in Eastern Cloud, especially for young shooters. They would travel far and wide to hone their skills. The journey was hard and dangerous. Few made it back.

Ye Chong was satisfied that none of them left. These young people were far from actual warriors, but they were molded according to Ye Chong's idea of an ideal soldier. Ye Chong was not interested in shooters. He was more in need of shooters who could pilot mechs. However, almost all shooters could not do this. Their bodies were simply too weak. A shooter who could pilot a mech would be very powerful, especially against creatures like the red-tailed beasts.

Nevertheless, it was rare for anyone apart from pure geniuses to excel in both mental and physical abilities.

These students would be Ye Chong's basis of protection. Ye Chong distributed all the money he had left to the students, for them to send back to their families. This gesture improved his reputation amongst the students even more.

Ye Chong called Xi Yan out. "Of all the weaponsmiths you know of, do you anyone who is good but has few close social ties?"

Xi Yan considered the question and replied, "I know a few."

"Give me the list of names and addresses," Ye Chong said.

...

Ye Chong went to Master Karu.

When Master Karu heard that Ye Chong was here to visit, he dropped everything he was working on and came to him. He knew that Ye Chong was not here for a chat, so he asked, "Why are you here to visit me? How can I help you?"

Ye Chong handed over a list of names to Master Karu. "I need these people."

Master Karu scanned the list briefly and said, "Of course." He turned to speak to a servant, and then went back to Ye Chong. "You'll have to wait a moment. Why do you need them? Don't you already have two students?"

Ye Chong found a good excuse. "I have an operation, and I need the manpower."

"I see." Master Karu's interest was piqued. "Is this a huge project?" Larger projects often needed the collaborative strength between many weaponsmiths. That was why Master Karu thought to ask. When Ye Chong mentioned an operation, the first thing he thought of was a large scale project.

Ye Chong nodded. "Yes."

"Haha, you should've just told me that. There's no need to find outsiders to help you when you can get them from me. Hmm, I'll assign 20 weaponsmiths to you." Master Karu offered warmly.

He did not wait for Ye Chong's consent before he called out a group of weaponsmiths. When Ye Chong saw them, he realized what Master Karu was trying to do. These so-called weaponsmiths were all young and inexperienced disciples only. They would not be able to offer any real help.

Master Karu had offered manpower to Ye Chong, but he was actually hoping to send these students out to learn from Ye Chong. Hopefully, they would return with much greater abilities than before.

Ye Chong looked straight at Master Karu and kept quiet.

Master Karu blushed awkwardly, and then coughed lightly. "You know, don't you, that the situation is a bit dangerous recently. We're also having a shortage of manpower here. These are the only people I can give you. You should teach them a few when you're free, err, and in exchange, they'll work for you, like labor work and stuff."

Ye Chong continued looking quietly at Master Karu.

Master Karu was feeling guilty now. Since Ye Chong refused to speak for a long moment after, he coughed again. "Sigh, you people, why so serious? How about this, I can offer you some

compensation?" Master Karu asked, testing the waters.

"What compensation?" Ye Chong's reaction was exactly what Master Karu had hoped for. As long as Ye Chong was willing to negotiate, all was well. If they could make this work, he would not lose anything from the negotiation.

Hence, Ye Chong bargained for some more valuable raw materials from Master Karu before "grudgingly" accepting the 20 young weaponsmiths. Master Karu's raw materials were much more high quality than the ones commonly found in the market.

Throughout the negotiation, Ye Chong only spoke a few words, and mostly kept silent. Master Karu was happy with the outcome, and grinned widely. Soon, the people in Ye Chong's list of names were brought to them.

Master Karu changed his whole bearing into one of great seriousness, and cleared his throat. "By the Eastern Cloud's law of war, you are all conscripted. From today onwards, you will serve your country without reserve. Master Ye Chong here will be in charge of you. Your duty is to assist and obey him. If you disobey your orders, you will be charged with treason!"

The weaponsmiths all looked shocked by Master Karu's stern announcement.

Master Karu turned back to Ye Chong, and the stern expression vanished immediately. He winked playfully at Ye Chong.

With that, Ye Chong brought the valuable raw materials, the 20 young weaponsmiths and the eight clueless civilian weaponsmiths back to his manor.

These weaponsmiths were divided between Kristen and Xi Yan. They spent half the time learning, and the other half making weird mechanical parts according to the schematics given to them. With thirty people working together, they were now much faster.

The war began very soon after.

Eastern Cloud now had a tense atmosphere. Prices for all goods and items soared. However, Ye Chong was not affected. When he and his Army of Glutinous Rice Balls were training, they were slowly making their way towards the central region of Eastern Cloud instead of the border without drawing any attention to them.

On this day, 10 days after the war first started, Ye Chong suddenly gathered all his students.

Five thousand training vehicles were all in position. The students were all inside their vehicles. After more than a year's training, they now looked like capable soldiers.

Ye Chong led their operation this time.

Ye Chong asked Xi Yan, "Ready?"

"Ready, teacher," Xi Yan replied. He took a long look at Ye Chong, then boarded the transport aircraft. Everyone else was there, except for Kristen.

There were five transport aircrafts, all modified by Ye Chong. They were piloted by five of the students, respectively.

"Move out."

Ye Chong announced the beginning of their flight just like usual. The five thousand training vehicles, or more precisely, the 4,995 training vehicles and five transport aircraft took air at the same time. They were flying towards Yedda City.

Ye Chong turned back to look at his manor, which grew smaller and smaller in view. He watched without expression.

"Goodbye, Kristen."

Chapter 567: Ye Chong's Preparations

Sha Ya was already waiting at Yedda City. She was sent to the city ahead of time. Though she did not know what Ye Chong was up to, she obeyed Ye Chong's orders dutifully. Knowing how strong Ye Chong was, she left for Yedda City feeling assured that Ye Chong did not need her protection. Here in Eastern Cloud, abandoning one's master was a despicable act. Sha Ya was grateful that her master was not that of a bad person.

When Sha Ya saw the massive army arriving, she was still caught off guard. She was used to seeing all five thousand training vehicles together, since they all flew together during the usual practice flights. However, this was the first time they had a few transport aircraft tagging along. She threw Ye Chong a look of bafflement, but discreetly kept her questions to herself. Sha Ya had already contacted the local authorities and prepared supplies for the army. Ye Chong and his security detachment replenished their stock of food and water here. Yedda City authorities were used to this. Master Ye Chong was a local celebrity. Besides, they were already used to having the Army of Glutinous Rice Balls restock their supplies in the city. Since they could claim for reimbursements every time the army resupplied, it was a good opportunity for the local authorities to profit from it.

Instead of flying in her own aircraft, Sha Ya boarded the transport aircraft that Ye Chong was on.

Ye Chong had modified the transport aircraft for greater load, better flight stability and slower flight. More importantly, the aircraft can now land vertically on the ground, bypassing the need for a landing field. These were all functions that normal transport aircraft and fighters lacked.

"What's our next stop after the resupply?" Sha Ya asked. Sha Ya was one of the few people in the Army of Glutinous Rice Balls who had actual battle experience. She was also a shooting instructor for

the army. Sometimes, she would lead the group of young recruits herself out for training. Everyone in the army knew her.

Ye Chong replied with an air of calmness, "Dual Forest."

Sha Ya was surprised. "That's too dangerous! They're not ready to enter Dual Forest." Dual Forest was not particularly challenging for Sha Ya, but it would be a very dangerous place for the inexperienced young soldiers. Sha Ya thought that the students would need at least another year's training to be ready to enter Dual Forest to practice actual combat. Surely her master understood this, but why did he still choose this course of action? Sha Ya did not think Ye Chong was the kind of person to train his soldiers without regard of their lives. This was clear from the way he designed the protection systems for the training vehicles.

Ye Chong replied without expression, "If we move quickly enough, there should be no problem."

"You want to enter Dual Forest?" Sha Ya gasped.

Ye Chong nodded. "Yes."

To enter Dual Forest would mean ... Sha Ya began to have an inkling of what Ye Chong was planning.

Dual Forest was full of tall and imposing ancient trees. Strays of sunlight found their way through the foliage, leaving scattered shadows on the grassy floor below.

The students were hesitant. This was a dangerous operation. Shu Mo'er was the only one amongst them who had been here. Not even Duan Qian and Shu Man'er had visited Dual Forest. Nevertheless, all of them were aware of the risks of entering the place.

The transport aircraft landed. The hatches opened up, and a huge spider walked out of it. Another Spider followed from behind, then another Spider, and another, and another ...

There were 40 Spiders in total. The first Spider looked leaner and

more agile than the other 39, which had a larger pilot cabin. Ye Chong and Sha Ya were in the first Spider, the only one designed for battle. The rest of the Spiders were built for transport.

Duan Qian and the other students had a simple order – follow the first Spider. The training vehicles were not fast, but they would fly quietly in the air while following the Spider. Besides, their smaller built allowed them to navigate through the forest more easily. All five thousand training vehicles slowly ascended until they were about five meters from the ground. They maintained this altitude and followed the first Spider in a long line. The five thousand training vehicles were separated from each other by three meters, and formed a long line behind the first Spider.

At the leading position was a student called Fisher. He was the best pilot in the army, especially when navigating complicated terrain. Hence, he was assigned to the first position. Since all the training vehicles used identical photon processors, geopositioning systems, comms systems and holographic scanning systems, all the training vehicles can be programmed to follow the route taken by the first training vehicle.

Ye Chong gave the order, and the army began its journey into Dual Forest. Many members of the public saw them, but none dared to follow.

The fully armed Spider led the army, with Ye Chong and Sha Ya in it.

Dual Forest did not cause them any distress. The creatures in Dual Forest all remembered the terrifying Spider. None of them approached to challenge its power. Having been here before, Ye Chong had the Spider marched full speed ahead, wasting no time investigating the route.

His time, they took only two days to traverse Dual Forest.

The students were all excited, having never been into Dual Forest. The looming trees and scattering wild animals that they

saw along the way had gotten them stirred up.

After Dual Forest was the Desert.

Sha Ya watched the desolate place with cold eyes and reminded Ye Chong, "We need to go pass the Desert as quickly as possible. The longer we spend time in here, the riskier it gets."

Ye Chong nodded. He shared the same concern. With such a large army and so much cargo, the only ones who were combat ready were him and Sha Ya. This meant that he and Sha Ya had to ensure the safety of the students.

It was a difficult situation, but Ye Chong also realized that this was the best chance to escape. Once he missed this window, it would only get harder to leave. Ye Chong had prepared extensively for this operation. Without Mu/Shang's help, he had to figure things out himself. Fortunately, this was not his first time leading an army. Compared to last time, he was now more composed and mature to deal with the situation. This was an improvement for him.

Before this, he had arranged for the students to practice long distance flights frequently. Yedda City and its vicinity were a common destination for them. Hence, they had had no trouble so far. The local authorities thought they were only having another routine training session. No one imagined that this was actually an attempt to escape.

Moreover, Ye Chong had taken great care when designing the so-called glutinous rice ball training vehicles. They were designed mainly with this escape operation in mind. The vehicles did not fly fast, but they were small and agile. As long as they did not encounter a sandstorm, they should be able to reach Darkniss without a hitch. Of course, Ye Chong had also prepared many other tools for contingencies.

The operation was sudden. Not even Sha Ya was informed of it. Ye Chong wanted no surprises. The students, whom he had

promoted now to be his security attachment, were also oblivious. They only thought it was one of the more important training exercises that Ye Chong would lead sometimes.

Ye Chong released the Hummingbirds. He used all 16 of them, instead of four. The students were too vulnerable now. Ye Chong had to be extra careful to reduce the odds of an accident.

All 16 Hummingbirds took off into the air, sending back images to Ye Chong in his Spider.

All good so far! Ye Chong sighed in relief. The sandstorm was his biggest concern. They were in luck this time. Everything was going smoothly so far.

Ye Chong delayed no further. He ordered the army to advance as quickly as possible.

320 training vehicles separated from formation and went to the 40 Spiders. A hook came down from each training vehicle, which was now attached to a mounting ring found on each of the Spider's legs. Eight hooks secured each Spider, which was then lifted by eight training vehicles into the air.

Ye Chong had come up with various scenarios in crossing the Desert, and found this to be the fastest way to get them across. He had also insisted that every student pass their training in lifting objects in a team. The students now realized the significance of their seemingly pointless training before this.

Weather in the Desert was unstable. The longer they stayed there, the more dangerous it would be. What was the fastest way to get across the Dessert? It had to be flying.

All five thousand training vehicles took off into the air, with the 320 training vehicles carrying the Spiders positioned at the center.

Now suspended in midair, Ye Chong did not spend his time idling around. He looked grim, or at least that was how Sha Ya perceived it. She knew the pressure that Ye Chong was facing now. The plan

was simply too crazy for her to accept!

She could see that Ye Chong had made plenty of preparations for this operation. Now that Ye Chong decided to leave Eastern Cloud, Sha Ya felt that she understood her master better. However, she still could not understand why Ye Chong would choose to bring an army of inexperienced students to Darkniss. It looked like a suicidal operation, at least to her.

"Why are you bringing them there?" Sha Ya could not help but asked. The matter puzzled her greatly.

Ye Chong did not answer. He kept his gaze firmly on the holographic screen, where the live feed from the Hummingbirds were displayed.

The training vehicles were slow, but still much faster compared to the Spider. Since there was no sandstorm, the students flew without meeting much resistance. With the exception of Shu Mo'er, none of the students knew they were now in the notorious Desert.

Being ignorant of the facts, they traveled without pressure.

After a whole day and night, they finally crossed the Desert. With no sandstorms, and with improved fighter aircraft, the Desert was actually not too dangerous for a shooter.

Now that they arrived in the Mist, it was still dangerous for them, especially for people without parapsychic sense. Nevertheless, Ye Chong had prepared for this as well. The training vehicles were now all linked in a straight line with hooks and mounting rings. As long as the leading training vehicle was heading in the right direction, the army would be able to advance without issue. For this part of the journey, Duan Qian was assigned as lead. He was one of the few students who had parapsychic sense. The Spiders were also linked to each other with hooks. This deceptively simple strategy was also very effective. In the Mist, comm channels were no longer usable. It was the only way to keep

them together.

With the comms down, the students faced a challenging situation. The longer this went on, the more likely for the students to have a mental breakdown. With no view of or communication with the outside world, it was a harsh situation for the inexperienced students to deal with.

Ye Chong did not to stay long in the Mist. He had also prepared the army for this.

Just outside the forest, his Spider came to a halt. Behind him, the training vehicles all crashed gently into the vehicle in front of them like a domino effect. The students were also used to this part thanks to their training. No one panicked. They simply stopped their training vehicles, and the whole army came to stop as well.

Ye Chong came out of his Spider, and took out a big heap of mechanical parts. These parts were all big, some even bigger than Ye Chong.

Sha Ya looked at Ye Chong, confused.

Ye Chong quickly assembled the parts. After five minutes, Sha Ya something she had never seen before – a big *ss photon cannon!

The barrel diameter was seven meters across, enough to fit a few people in it. Sha Ya swallowed with difficulty. She felt a little numb.

Ye Chong redirected the cannon's barrel, and then began to fill it up with energy crystals. He stopped at 50 of the energy crystals. Sha Ya was shocked speechless. This was simply too crazy! The world had gone crazy!

A ship cannon! Ye Chong was familiar with these. He had thought of building one ever since his last visit. It was easier to clear out a path using a ship cannon.

Hence, he brought one with him this time.

Chapter 568: All Going As Planned, Right?

Ye Chong's huge cannon surprised not only Sha Ya, but also Duan Qian. His parapsychic sense kept him in touch with anything happening around him.

Ye Chong made further calibrations. Five minutes later, he was done.

He inhaled deeply and pushed the button to fire the weapon.

Boom!

A massive photon beam shot out soundlessly from the cannon barrel, a silent beam of dazzling light. Ye Chong narrowed his eyes. Even through the dense mist, the beam was still too bright to see with the naked eye.

The beam vanished soon enough, but Ye Chong had to wait a second for the afterimage from the beam to vanish before he opened his eyes again.

In front of Ye Chong, a 10 meter wide cylindrical passage was formed. In this passage, all the plants were destroyed, leaving only charred marks on the ground. The heat from the photon beam had essentially vaporized everything in its way. Ye Chong could even see a red spot at the end of the cleared passage that was the Red Wasteland, but the mist soon covered the entire passage.

The view reverted back to plain purple.

Ye Chong was happy with the outcome. He did not look back at the ship cannon, which was now just useless. Ye Chong did not use rare materials to construct the cannon, but opted instead for common materials. The ship cannon was too large, making it too costly to use rare materials. Besides, the ship cannon was not too important for Ye Chong. It was only needed for this single shot. Since the ship cannon was made of normal materials, it could not withstand the energy load from the first shot.

However, this was enough for Ye Chong.

Ye Chong went back into his Spider and advanced into the passage. Behind him, the other Spiders followed. Duan Qian caught up as well. He was still shocked by that powerful cannon shot. If it was directed at a person, even the edges would take off any limb or finger in its way.

Nevertheless, Duan Qian quickly focused back on his task. As leader of the army, and given the arrangement of the training vehicles, his duty was important. If he had any missteps, the students him would all be in danger.

All the students were now tensed. They could only know what to do next from the pulling force of the hooks on their training vehicles. Even though they had gone through this training repeatedly, they were still very nervous when it came to the real thing. Some of them were already sweating all over. The pressure on them was immense.

The Spider moved very quickly, but also carefully. A line of Spiders were trailing behind Ye Chong. Ye Chong had chosen a special batch of students to man these Spiders. The Spiders had a control console identical to the ones in the training vehicles. Hence, the maneuvering part was mostly similar.

The only thing the Spiders needed to be careful about here were the swamps. Ye Chong had repeatedly taught these students how to free themselves of obstacles in swampy areas. As for the training vehicles flying at low latitudes, they need not worry about the swamp.

Ye Chong's teachings did not go to waste. The students traversed through the swamps without issues behind him, and did not hamper the army's advance.

In the end, the army crossed the Mist without trouble.

Once they reached the Red Wilderness, Ye Chong heaved a sigh of

relief. He had made all the preparations he could think of, but still he felt nervous throughout the entire journey. The students were too vulnerable. If they were normal mech pilots, Ye Chong would not have worried so much.

Ye Chong ordered the army to rest here for one full day.

The Mist did not take them too long to traverse, but it was a test unlike any before it for the students. The mental stress was exhausting for the inexperienced students. Since the Red Wilderness was safe, Ye Chong had ordered the army to stay here and recuperate for an entire day.

The students had never seen so much of the world in their entire lives as they had in these few days. This made a lot of them excited, but got some of them nervous. They had never been in such a dangerous situation before. Nevertheless, the students still gathered and talked eagerly over their meals.

Sha Ya looked at the young and naïve faces of the students, and sighed inside.

"These students, how many of them will survive this?" Sha Ya directed the pointed question at Ye Chong.

Ye Chong replied calmly, "The ones who qualify will survive." Ye Chong did not think he was being cruel. He had been treated more ruthlessly than this before. The way he saw it, those who were not fit enough would be left behind. To survive, one must be strong enough, simple as that. It was a rule of Nature, and of human society.

The rule was fair to all, even to himself. There was no cruelty or kindness to speak of.

Sha Ya went quiet. She could not understand Ye Chong's reasoning. She thought Ye Chong was being contradictory. He can stand being humiliated or told off, but he would kill anyone whom he ascertained to be a threat to his life. There would be no warning

before he made his move. A cold and cruel man like him had, however, chosen to spend so much effort on his students, and would even care for their welfare.

Ye Chong was not in this operation alone. He and Sha Ya stood guard. The Red Wilderness did not have any dangerous creatures, but Ye Chong knew that there were other shooters here. Darkniss did not belong to any country. Its borders were connected to multiple countries, so it was possible for them to encounter shooters from other countries.

Any shooter who could reach the Red Wilderness must be quite competent. If they showed up, the inexperienced students would not be a match for them. Hence, Ye Chong and Sha Ya had to babysit the students.

Now that they were here, Ye Chong did not have to be too discreet with his actions.

He withdrew Celest.

When the huge figure that was Celest appeared before everyone, they were all flabbergasted. The entire camp went silent. Everyone was shocked.

Celest's 10-metre tall figure was intimidating. Black armor covered its entire body, leaving only the face exposed. The giant had sharp angles on its face and half lidded eyes. On its helmet was a red feather that shot up toward the sky like a flame. There were eerie decorations of red flowers on its wrists, elbows, knees and waist. The giant carried a black box on its back, which also had a large and splendid red flower on it.

"The giant!" Shu Mo'er cried out, looking very pale. She and her group had gone to Yedda City because of the giant that Duo Ka spoke of. That was also how they came to know Ye Chong and got into a conflict with him. Shu Mo'er felt like her brain was about to explode.

Ye Chong threw a cold glance at Shu Mo'er. Celest's pilot cabin opened up just then.

Under the close attention of his large audience, Ye Chong entered the pilot cabin. He would not have time to enter Celest if any shooter were to appear suddenly. Ye Chong did not have watch his actions too much here. Besides, there should not be any fighter aircrafts here. Even if there were, Ye Chong was not afraid of them. The upgraded Celest was so powerful that not even its pilot, Ye Chong, knew exactly what it was capable of.

It would not hurt to be too careful. Ye Chong always chose the option that guaranteed the best results, even if it might be a lot of work.

The rest of the army watched with surprise, awe and disbelief as Celest finally moved!

Celest opened its half lidded eyes that shone brightly with life. Its eyes were devoid of emotion, just like Ye Chong's eyes.

Celest stepped forward slowly, its heavy footsteps hammering into the hearts of its audience.

In the pilot cabin, Ye Chong tapped on the control console with familiar strokes and activated its holographic scanning system. Celest's holographic scanning system was far more advanced than its primitive counterpart in the training vehicles. In fact, its holographic scanning system was top of the line.

There was no one around them. Ye Chong had given an order for Celest to expand its holographic scanning range to its maximum.

After this precautionary step, Ye Chong did not stop to relax. To the inexperienced students, the past few days had been very stressful, but Ye Chong considered them to be all part of his normal life. His mind was much tougher than normal people.

Time should never be wasted. This was one of Ye Chong's core principles.

Now, what should he be doing? Training, of course!

Training had been a huge part of Ye Chong's life. Whenever he had the time, he would dedicate himself to practicing. No matter how dry or basic the routine, he would repeatedly practice them. At his level, he might only be able to perform a basic move one millisecond faster after a million repetitions, but still he never faltered. This was why he could become so strong, and continue to become stronger and stronger.

Despite the audience, his training routine was not disrupted.

Ye Chong began his training as usual. First was the basics. Ye Chong never gave up on fundamentals. This was because Mu had once told him that all combat moves were made up of the basic moves. He never forgot this lesson, and held onto it as one of his training principles.

When Duan Xian saw the giant in black armor began to practice basic moves, he was stunned.

He never imagined that he would get to see a 10-metre giant in black armor performing basic combat moves like a combat expert.

It was mind-bending, to say the least!

He was a combat expert himself, and could see that Celest's every move was actually designed for battle!

More surprising was the fact that the giant could move deftly and quickly despite its size. Duan Qian found himself shaken by this observation. If a massive fist was able to strike out so quickly, it must be very powerful.

Compared to Duan Qian's more informed observations, the other students only saw the giant moving about. Nevertheless, it left quite an impression for them. The giant was huge, like a small hill. It was so heavy that every step shook the ground beneath them. The students who were sitting on the ground felt this more acutely than others. They could feel the weight and power behind the

tremors that radiated through their bodies.

When a small hill in front of you was moving faster than a fighter, and more agile than a leopard, that feeling was simply ...

It was simply too exciting!

Ye Chong completely ignored his surprised audience as he immersed himself completely into his training. After the basic moves, he moved on to more complicated battle moves.

When had the students ever seen such a dazzling display of mech combat? Every punch and kick was powerful and imposing. They could even hear the air whistling whenever the giant struck out quickly.

Duan Qian watched with his mouth gaping. The combat moves that the giant was performing were already more complicated than what he had learned so far. His biggest question now was, just what in the world was this giant?

Ye Chong did not know that his training demonstration had completely convinced his students of a mech's strength. When the students were offered the chance to use mechs as their weapons, there would be no objections. This was because they had seen Ye Chong train in one. Unlike shooters, they did not have so-called shooter's pride, and could accept mechs faster.

When Ye Chong was finished, he finally noticed the worshipping stares from his students.

He was not pleased because of this. In fact, he felt nothing at all. He rarely cared about how others saw him.

He only stayed true to himself.

Ye Chong did not exhaust himself from his training, since he must be prepared for enemies. Even so, he was already drenched in sweat by now. Ye Chong panted slightly, and focused on recovering.

Waiting and guarding his students were both tasks that required patience, but that was always a quality of Ye Chong's. Perhaps what he was doing now seemed dry and uninteresting, but Ye Chong could always find the energy to continue and persist in doing them.

There were no surprises so far, and this comforted Sha Ya. By now, the students had gotten used to having the giant moving among them.

The army soon reached the entrance to Darkniss, with Ye Chong and Sha Ya leading the students.

Chapter 569: New Beginnings

Ye Chong did not let his students enter Darkniss without taking precautions. He had a student drive a Spider, with Sha Ya onboard. Ye Chong's orders to Sha Ya were simple – eliminate all creatures within a 10 kilometre radius around the entrance of Darkniss. Ye Chong believed that with Sha Ya's capabilities and the Spider's firepower, this should not be too hard to accomplish.

If Sha Ya could drive a Spider, she would be even stronger in battle. Sha Ya might not be able to pilot a mech due to lacking physical fitness, but the Spider would not be too hard for her. It seemed that she would have to be trained for the Spider soon. Right now, every form of resource was precious.

Ye Chong and his students all waited at the entrance to Darkniss.

Three hours later, Sha Ya returned. Ye Chong knew that the work was done. He quickly ordered for everyone to go through the entrance.

It was a strange looking spatial window. Many of the students were intimidated by it, but they dared not go against Ye Chong's orders. In the end, all the students entered the spatial window.

Ye Chong was the last one to enter Darkniss. Celest's dimension keystone would affect the spatial window, so he had to keep Celest back into its own dimension and cross through the eerie black circle that was suspended in midair. There was a weird sensation the moment he crossed the boundary between spaces, but Ye Chong did not have time to study it in detail.

Once in Darkniss, Ye Chong found all the students huddled together nervously. The dark and mysterious Darkniss was now before their very eyes.

Even the bold and daring Duan Qian looked a little unsettled. He approached Ye Chong while his eyes wandered and asked,

"Teacher, what is this place?"

The students were now officially Ye Chong's personal security detachment. By right, they should address Ye Chong as "sir". However, a few of them, like Duan Qian, still called Ye Chong "teacher". Ye Chong never cared about titles, and so he did not bother to correct them.

"Darkniss," Ye Chong replied plainly.

"Darkniss?" Duan Qian paled instantly. He gulped heavily and asked, "Teacher, why are we here?"

"That's right, Sir, it's too dangerous here, let's turn back."

"Sir, only Level 7 or 8 shooters can come here!"

The students all spoke up, tensed. They wanted to leave right away. Darkniss was no tourist attraction. It was the most dangerous place in the world. Any random creature in this place could tear the army apart. None of them imagined that Ye Chong would bring them here to Darkniss.

Ye Chong ignored their outbursts and looked towards Sha Ya.

Sha Ya nodded. "The perimeter is clear."

Ye Chong nodded slightly, and then turned towards his students.

"Fall in."

Ye Chong commanded softly without expression. He was not loud, but the coldness in his voice went straight to the hearts of his students.

The rowdy crowd went silent immediately.

The students squirmed under Ye Chong's gaze. They realized immediately that their master was angry! In the next moment, all of them scurried towards their positions.

Their training was still worth something. In just a few moments, five groups in formation presented themselves before Ye Chong.

It was silent once again.

All the students were nervous. If it was Instructor Liao who got offended, the consequences would be unthinkable. However, even the short tempered Instructor Liao was always respectful towards Ye Chong. To the students, Ye Chong was even more intimidating than Instructor Liao. All the students kept their mouth shut.

"You are all members of my security detachment. You are in no position to disobey my orders. You have two choices – to obey or disobey me. I will kill anyone who disobeys me." Ye Chong's announcement was delivered quietly and flatly. Even so, he made his point very clearly.

All the students were shaken by his words. They regretted for all the complaints they were making earlier.

Indeed, their master was even scarier than Instructor Liao!

Sha Ya stood expressionless beside Ye Chong. However, she was also unsettled by Ye Chong. The killing aura from Ye Chong was unlike any she had encountered before. She had her share of vicious and ruthless shooters, but Ye Chong's aura was markedly different from theirs.

His was calm and unassuming, but solid and undeterred. It was clear that he was a veteran who had been through a lot.

"From today onwards, we will set our base here. From now on, you will live here. I will teach you how to fight, and provide you with new weapons. However, this is Darkniss. Only the strong will survive."

Ye Chong explained the situation to his students clearly, leaving no illusion.

When he was done, he turned to leave. He knew that the students needed time to digest the information. Ye Chong approached the weaponsmiths, who were also white as a sheet. The weaponsmiths were all trembling with fear, with the exception of Xi Yan. Xi Yan

was not unafraid, but he was confident that his teacher did not force all of them here to Darkniss simply to die.

"Gentlemen, we have no time to be scared. We need to start working now, unless you want to camp out here in the wilderness tonight," Ye Chong said to them, and turned to leave. Xi Yan was the first to react, following Ye Chong from behind. The rest of the weaponsmiths exchanged looks, and slowly came to accept their situation. They still looked scared, but they all got up and followed Ye Chong.

Ye Chong had originally planned to have about eight weaponsmiths to help him, but now there were 30 of them, including him. Even though the 20 young weaponsmiths were only of average abilities, they were still precious manpower for Ye Chong.

The more energetic and resolved students, like Duan Qian, realized what they must do very quickly. They started to unpack the load from the 40 Spiders. Ye Chong had already prepared many tools for them. The machines were too complicated for Duan Qian and the other students to understand, but the weaponsmiths learned how to use them quickly. They would use the tools to build simple laser cutting machines.

The weaponsmiths were surprised by the fancy new tools. This helped to soothe their fear and boost morale. They immersed themselves in their work soon enough.

As for the design of their base, Ye Chong had already drawn up the plans in his manor.

The simple laser cutting machines could be fitted onto the training vehicles and used to cut huge rocks into blocks of five metres by two metres. Once they got familiar with the machines, each block would take only 15 seconds. The simple laser cutting machines were easy to maneuver. Ye Chong taught his students how to use them, and then they got down to business.

They cut out blocks of rock from the cliffs nearby, and used the clamps fitted into their training vehicles to move the blocks back to base.

Here in the darkness of Darkniss, the first signs of large scale human activity emerged.

The armed Spider was given to Sha Ya. Her task was to learn how to maneuver the Spider, and then patrol the perimeter to kill any wild animals that tried to trespass.

Work progressed quickly. In just seven days, they were nearly done. Ye Chong used the binding agent derived from candygrass to glue the blocks of rocks together. Just a tiny amount was enough to keep the rocks firmly in place.

Their base looked like a standard stronghold. It was hexagonal when seen from above. This stronghold constructed with rocks was only for temporary use, but Ye Chong did not neglect in its functionalities. The stronghold could accommodate the entire army, with room for specialized laboratories and mechanical workshops. There were also three physical training grounds and 15 standard mech training grounds. There was an infirmary as well. There were only a few types of medication available, and no advanced equipment, but Ye Chong had still allocated space for the infirmary.

The stronghold was heavily armed. Ye Chong installed many laser weapons for the base. All the weapons of the stronghold were connected to photon circuits, even though it was time consuming to do so. When Ye Chong first started designing the base, he had been vexed by the problem of armaments. The safety of the base was of the highest priority. Without enough firepower, it was impossible to survive in Darkniss.

Accurate aiming could be achieved if he had sufficiently sophisticated photon processors and holographic scanning system. Ye Chong did not have both. Hence, he had to switch tactics. He

recalled the battle around Yi Ju, where laser weapons were used. Even the powerful red-tailed beasts were curbed by the laser weapons, provided the weapons were powerful enough and in great numbers.

The laser weapons did not require sophisticated photon processors and holographic scanning systems. Instead, it relied on wide coverage attacks at high energy intensity. The disadvantage to this approach was that it was highly energy consuming. Fortunately, Ye Chong did not have to worry about energy supply.

Energy crystals came cheap in Eastern Cloud. He purchased a sizable amount of energy crystals without spending a fortune. The energy crystals that he brought with him for this operation were enough to last them quite some time. Apart from that, once they established a firm position in Darkniss, they would have enough power to return to Eastern Cloud as an independent force. By then, it did not matter if they wanted to purchase or resort to other means ...

Either way, it would not be so difficult! That was Ye Chong's conclusion. Once his stronghold was armed, the lasers would cover all directions around the base.

Ye Chong finally relaxed a little with the weapons installed. All the students felt relieved as well. After sleeping overnight in their training vehicles for the past week or so, they could now rest within the safety of the stronghold. The structure was much larger than they thought. Such a massive stronghold was nearly the size of a small town. It was something for them to feel proud about, having built the stronghold themselves.

Now, they felt more hopeful for their futures!

No one had ever built such a massive and grand structure in such a short time. They thought that Ye Chong was truly a man of wonders. What other miracles would he bring to their lives?

The students could not wait to find out!

Ye Chong took out everything he kept in Celest's dimension keystone. All the weaponsmiths stared at the great variety of equipment that Ye Chong conjured out of nowhere. When Ye Chong declared that they could use the equipment, the weaponsmiths, including Xi Yan, cheered with joy.

Everyone was now in the stronghold. Flat floorboards and cosy rooms awaited them. After all the hard work, the students were all smiles at their new home.

Ye Chong was not satisfied with the rock structure of the stronghold, since the rocks did not offer enough protection. Once they could extract metals on a large scale, Ye Chong would fit the rocks with thick metal shields. That would make this a real stronghold. When that happened, even the red-tailed beasts would not threaten Ye Chong.

After a resting for half a day, Ye Chong summoned everyone.

From this moment onwards, the students must learn. They must learn how to fight and improve their capabilities. The weaponsmiths must learn new mechanical concepts.

Ye Chong demonstrated how to use a photon processor. Everyone had their own photon processor. These bio-photon processors were not very powerful, but they were more than enough for the students to learn how to use the machines. Here in the stronghold, all the photon processors were connected, and can be used for communication. Ye Chong had prepared basic course material from a wide variety of subjects and stored them in the photon processors. The students would study in this way. That was how Ye Chong studied when he was in the Five Galaxies.

No one had ever seen such an advanced way of teaching. Only Xi Yan knew about it when Ye Chong gave him memory chips and a learning machine earlier.

It was like living in a dream. Everything was new and intriguing. The students soon forgot about the darkness in Darkniss, and

instead bean to think about the warmth and brightness in the stronghold.

Next, Ye Chong announced that the first 100 students who mastered the course material would get their own mechs.

The students were all invigorated by this reward. They already knew what a mech as, and looked forward to being a mech pilot as described in their photon processors. The peaceful stronghold was now filled with determined students who were eager to learn. The weaponsmiths had a better appreciation of what was offered to them. They studied everyday with great diligence. All the knowledge in the photon processors was new to them, and far advanced than anything they had learned. How could they afford to waste such a wonderful opportunity?

Just as everyone was absorbed in their learning journey, Ye Chong visited the nearby Lava River unnoticed. The stronghold was positioned strategically. It was near the entrance to Darkniss on one side, and separated from the rest of Darkniss by the Lava River, a natural form of defense. It would take an extraordinarily powerful creature like the snowshade leopard to cross the Lava River, which stretched a few dozen meters across.

Bright red lava flowed sluggishly in the Lava River. When the lava encountered a drop in the riverbed, it would crash down and splash like magnificent fireworks. Simply standing by the River, feeling the heat waves coming from it, made breathing difficult for Ye Chong.

Ye Chong watched the lava slowly flowing pass him, where bright red wavy stripes would frequently emerge. Lava was formed when rocks melted. Metals would often be melted in the process as well. These metals in liquid form were responsible for the bright red stripes.

Ye Chong planned to extract these liquid metals. If he could figure out a way to extract them, they would be metals of high

purity. Extracting the metals in this way would also save time, effort and energy.

However, the problem of extraction remained to be solved.

After observing for a while more, Ye Chong returned to the stronghold.

He went to his lab and began to work. This went on for three days. When he finally emerged from the lab, he called for Xi Yan and a few of the younger weaponsmiths.

The group went to the Lava River in a Spider. Xi Yan and his colleagues had no idea what Ye Chong was thinking of.

Ye Chong unloaded all the things in the Spider and directed his men to work. After two hours, they constructed a small building by the River. The building housed a photon processor and holographic scanning system, with complicated piping works and a confusing control console.

They then used an excavator to dig three trenches about a hundred metres from the building. Each trench was a hundred meters long and 15 metres deep. A thick pipeline ran along the building, connecting to three metre-wide ditches at the farther end. These three ditches continued downhill at a 30-degree slope, until they were connected with the three trenches, respectively.

"What is this?" Xi Yan looked at the strange building by the Lava River, and could not figure it out. The heat from the Lava River made him uncomfortable.

"It's a liquid metal auto-extractor." Ye Chong pushed the activation button.

The pipes that reached above the Lava River lowered themselves into the River. Then, bright red liquid was pumped out through the thick pipeline, flowing down along the first ditch until it reached one of the trenches. Through the holographic scanning system, they could track exactly where the liquid metal was.

Suddenly, a mechanical claw suspended above the River lowered itself into the lava and emerged again with a black colored object the size of a human head.

Ye Chong saw Xi Yan's confusion, and explained, "That's solid metal. It's melting point is too high for the lava to melt it. This kind of metal is even more valuable." Xi Yan and the other weaponsmiths began to understand what they were seeing. Ye Chong added, "The mechanical claw and the pipeline are all made of metals with high melting points."

Xi Yan and his team were all interested in the auto-extractor. They went inside the building and studied the machinery inside, marvelling at the details of the structure. Ye Chong saw how absorbed they were, and had to return to the stronghold himself. He left the Spider behind for them to return with. Ye Chong found that Spider to be an excellent means of transport within Darkniss. They were easy to use, and did not move too quickly, perfect for beginners.

The liquid metal auto-extractor was linked to the main photon processor back at the stronghold. Once a trench was filled up, it would redirect the liquid metal to the next trench. When the liquid metal in the first trench had cooled down, Ye Chong would send people here to retrieve the solidified metal block.

The solid metal block was still a mixture of different metals, and had to be further processed. However, this was much easier than mining for metal ores directly.

On the third day, the first trench was filled up. Ye Chong had to send 50 training vehicles to move the huge solid metal block back to the stronghold.

The metal block was stored in the warehouse. Ye Chong had not built his metal isolator machine yet, but he ordered the students to cut the metal block into many smaller pieces.

Time was precious. All the weaponsmiths were assigned to help

Ye Chong build this huge machine.

One of the many devices Ye Chong obtained from the base on Spectre was a metal isolator, but it was only suitable for laboratory experiments, not for large scale processing. Ye Chong had to build a larger metal isolator based on the smaller version, or his goal to extract metals on a large scale would never be realized.

Ye Chong was beginning to appreciate how hard it was to start from scratch!

Chapter 570: Two Shooters

Lava River was like an endless source of treasure, full of natural resources. However the liquid metal obtained from it cannot be used directly, since it was a mixture of different metal elements that must isolated out from the mixture. The metal isolator machine would do the trick, but even though there were now three huge blocks worth of metal in the warehouse, Ye Chong was still not done with the machine.

The larger version of the metal isolator was more difficult to build than Ye Chong anticipated. He spent nearly half a month just to build the machine.

The completed machine was about 20 metres tall. Just standing before this huge machine made people realize just how small humans were.

The small metal pieces cut from the large metal block were transported to the isolator machine via a conveyor belt, and would leave the machine in purified forms of different metal elements. These pure metal elements would be delivered to different zones. Each element had its own unique zone and processing procedures. The huge metal isolator worked efficiently, completing the elemental isolation processing work in just half a day.

The weaponsmiths could hardly believe what they had achieved. They never imagined that they would be able to build such a wonderful machine in their lives. While Ye Chong was the one who did the heavy lifting, they were still grateful for having being part of the construction.

By now, they were all convinced of Ye Chong's abilities. Such a complicated piece of machinery was unheard of. They did not even think it was possible. Additionally, they never imagined that the gravstones could be used in this way, producing pieces of beautiful and pure metals. The pure metals looked otherworldly. They now

realized how underused the gravstones were in their hands.

Having seen first-hand what they could achieve, the weaponsmiths studied the materials in their photon processors with even more fervor. As long they studied hard, they would be able to master this mysterious field of knowledge.

Ye Chong was basically working as the engineer of the army. With heaps of pure metals lying around, he must use them to build something in order to unleash their full potential.

Even in the He Yue Galaxy, such a huge metal isolator machine was challenging to construct. However, Ye Chong had forcefully brought the machine into existence. He was the biggest benefactor of this endeavor. With this experience, it should be easier the next time he wanted to build other large machines.

Now, he must prepare a smelting furnace. Only with the furnace could he be able to produce metal alloys. Alloys were much tougher than pure metals, and could exhibit physical properties not found in normal metals. Ye Chon had many types of alloys in mind to produce. He would be able to produce alloys on a large scale with the smelting furnace.

The advanced equipment at Ye Chong's disposal had been very helpful. The laboratory grade advanced smelting furnace allowed him to produce high quality metal alloys. These alloys were abundant, but they were sufficient enough to build mechanical parts for large machinery.

The most important thing now was for the stronghold to be able to produce its own machinery. Ye Chong had to put his personal training sessions on hold to study more about machinery. Fortunately, with his strong foundational knowledge and years of wide experience, he would usually be able to find his way through complicated issues after tinkering with them for some time. Even when he found himself stuck, there were still the three chips left behind by Kui for him. The three chips contained details of all the

research work done by the Research Consortium since its formation. Some of the technical skills described inside were not very advanced, but what they lacked in depth was made up with breadth. Ye Chong thought of the chips as his very own encyclopaedia.

Suddenly, Ye Chong's comms device rang. Ye Chong did not have many comms devices for all the students. Only a few of the main personnel had one, such as Sha Ya, Xi Yan and Duan Qian. The other students could only watch them with jealousy.

Ye Chong took the call. It was Sha Ya.

"What is it?" Ye Chong did not mince words.

Sha Ya replied with her characteristic hoarse voice, "We have a situation. I spot two shooters nearby." Sha Ya was the only person in the army who did not address Ye Chong as "sir" or "teacher".

"Where?" Ye Chong asked calmly, but he had already set aside his tools and stood up.

He hurried towards Celest, which he stored nearby, and climbed into its pilot cabin. He walked quickly but calmly. He had always left Celest close by in case of emergencies, so that he could leave as soon as required.

"In Grid D9-F4." Sha Ya was familiar with the geopositioning system on the photon processor by now, and responded quickly. She added, "They're 20 kilometres away from me, and they have not spotted me yet. I'm sending over my exact location."

"Keep an eye on them and maintain your distance. I'm coming over," Ye Chong replied succinctly. Celest lifted off just as he finished.

The advantages offered by the holographic scanning system were apparent in situations like this. Even a simplified version of the holographic scanning system was more powerful than parapsychic sense. This advantage gave them the upper hand to initiate

contact, and was especially important in the event of a war.

Celest was fast. Here in Darkniss, Ye Chong piloted the mech without reserve.

Ye Chong had long anticipated this day. There were not many Level 7 or 8 shooters, but most of them would definitely visit Darkniss to challenge themselves. However, these two shooters were in D9-F4, which was not near the entrance of Darkniss. Were they already here before his army?

Ye Chong was not worried about Level 8 shooters, but a Level 9 shooter like Mei Wu would be cause for concern. He still did not know exactly how strong Mei Wu was. It was rare for Ye Chong to not be able to gauge his opponents. That was why Ye Chong did not seek Mei Wu when he arrived in Darkniss.

Ye Chong soon located Sha Ya's Spider. Sha Ya's daily routine was to patrol the perimeter of their stronghold. Her job was to kill any approaching wild animals and to look out for trouble.

Sha Ya noticed Celest in the air. She could not figure out how the massive thing could fly so high up in the air.

Up in the air, Celest looked as powerful and indifferent as a God.

Celest's holographic scanning system was far more powerful than the Spider's. Ye Chong's holographic feed showed a much clearer image than the one Sha Ya received. Ye Chong transmitted the clearer feed to the Spider below.

On the holographic screen were two shooters, advancing cautiously. They had their laser guns out, and had backpacks. Ye Chong noticed that their outfit was different from the shooters he had seen before.

"They are shooters from Western Frost," Sha Ya reported confidently. Western Frost and Eastern Cloud were enemy countries, but the animosity did not extend to its resident shooters. Level 8 shooters like Sha Ya were not interested in

contributing towards their countries. They were more interested in improving their own capabilities, and did not care for materialistic gains. Aside that, high level shooters never had to worry about money. Their visits to Darkniss would always yield enough returns for them to buy high quality weapons from the weaponsmiths and enough to spare for a decent living.

Hence, nationality did not matter much for high level shooters. Sha Ya knew high level shooters from other countries personally, and had a close relationship with many of them.

"How strong are they?" Ye Chong asked.

Sha Ya pondered for a moment. "About Level 7 or 8." Shooters were always keenly aware of their kind.

"Capture them." Ye Chong considered, and then gave the order. If the two shooters were captured, it would be easier for him.

"Alright."

Celest and the Spider moved out together. High up in the air, Celest shot towards the two shooters. On the ground, the Spider moved its eight legs quickly, unhindered by the uneven terrain.

However, Celest was much faster than the Spider. When Celest was about five kilometres away from the shooters, they finally noticed the bio-mech. By then, it was already too late.

Five kilometres was a very short distance for Celest. It was just a short sprint away.

The massive figure in the air came as a shock to the two shooters. Celest was so fast that they could barely react. One of them managed to pull the trigger.

A laser beam shot straight at the massive figure.

The two shooters felt relieved, but quickly realized in disbelief that something was wrong.

How was this possible?

The laser beam that could have shot through all kinds of wild animals left only a charred mark on the giant's armor.

Before they could fire the second shot, a huge spear, wider than a pail in diameter, was directed at them. The giant held the weapon in one hand and pointed the cold gleaming tip at the two shooters.

The two shooters froze, looking very pale. They dared not move, for fear of being crushed into mush by the massive weapon.

The giant behaved oddly. It simply held onto the weapon and pointed it at them, but did nothing else. Just when the two shooters were still trying to figure it out, they saw a huge spider, about seven metres tall, running towards them. It was almost twice as fast as a biped tyrasaur.

Heavens! What were these things?

The shooters nearly blacked out from shock and fear. Here was a 10-metre giant and a 7-metre spider right in front of them. Had they arrived in a world of giants?

Both shooters remained absolutely rigid. Even their fingers were frozen in motion.

The shooters stared in horror as the huge spider made its way towards them eagerly.

When Ye Chong and Sha Ya brought the two unconscious shooters back to the stronghold, people barely noticed them. The students were all focused in their studies. They had all the course material with them, and knew exactly what they had to do. However, there was simply too much knowledge to absorb, so the students had to work as hard as they could manage. They did not need further reminder from Ye Chong to study hard. The students understood their situation. No one dared to take shortcuts. As Ye Chong had told them, only the strong will survive.

Besides, the first 100 students who mastered their course material will get their mechs in advance. This was enough motivation for

the students. They had seen the huge metal blocks extracted from the Lava River recently. These strange materials looked enticing. They could not wait to try their hands on actual mechs.

Ye Chong and Sha Ya were now getting ready to interrogate the two shooters. Ye Chong had confiscated their weapons. Personal firearms like those laser guns could not harm Celest. Only firearms from fighter aircrafts could pose a threat to Celest.

Shooters without their weapons could not threaten Ye Chong.

Sha Ya looked at the two unconscious shooters, and asked with a grimace, "Should we wait until they wake up?"

"No need." Ye Chong picked up a pail of cold water and splashed them mercilessly.

Sha Ya shuddered inside, feeling sympathetic towards the shooters. With their abilities, they would have been treated with respect no matter where they went. Even if they captured, they would never be treated so harshly. Only Ye Chong would treat high level shooters just like anyone else.

The two shooters woke up slowly, shuddering from the cold.

It was a harsh treatment, especially for shooters. They were very sensitive to their surroundings. Even the cold would be magnified in their senses. The two shooters, now awake, looked very pale. Their lips had turned blue-black as they shivered from the cold.

Sha Ya looked at them sympathetically and asked, "What are your names?"

"Albinia." "Lotes." The two shooters answered with trembling voices. They were shocked and terrified, and not fully themselves yet. What they saw today was simply too strange to be true, it felt more like a nightmare.

Both shooters laid themselves bare to Sha Ya's questioning.

As suspected, they were from Western Frost. They had just

reached Level 8, and wanted to try out their skills in Darkniss. However, they came across a terrible accident.

Then, they recalled the giant, and the huge spider ...

The shooters exchanged a look of disbelief. Could it be ...

"You two ... The huge spider ... The giant ..." Albinia faltered.

Sha Ya noticed Albinia's wrist then. She looked into his eyes and asked, "Who is your teacher?"

Chapter 571: Important Intel

Albinia paused. He quickly grasped the significance of the question and replied, "My teacher is Levent. And you are ..." If he could figure out how they were related, his situation might be improved.

"Levent. As I suspected ..." Sha Ya felt relieved.

She noticed Ye Chong looking at her, and explained, "I know Levent. We worked together before. He likes to put on a green colored string as a bracelet on his wrist, and often shows it off, that's why I remember it. Looks like his student inherited the quirk."

Albinia was overjoyed. It was quite fortunate for the lady to know his teacher.

"What do we do with them?" Sha Ya turned to Ye Chong. Since they were students of a friend, she hoped Ye Chong would not kill them. However, she also knew that Ye Chong was never hesitant in killing. Albinia and Lotesh waited in suspense like it was the Day of Judgment.

Ye Chong asked, "How did you enter Darkniss?" The question was a curious one. Every country, including Western Frost, Eastern Cloud and Northern Lands had an entrance to Darkniss. Ye Chong had heard of it, but he did not know the details.

"We started from the Wilkinson Range, then entered the Maze Tunnels through the Snowy Ridge. From there, we entered Darkniss. We went deeper and deeper inside for I don't know how long, and then we got lost and couldn't find the entrance anymore," Albinia explained haltingly, looking vexed. It was easy to tell from their tattered clothing that the past few days had not been easy for them.

Wilkinson Range, Snowy Ridge, Maze Tunels – Ye Chong had not

yet heard of these places, and thus could not quite understand the context. Sha Ya, however, was familiar with them. She explained, "Western Frost has another entrance into Darkniss, different to one in Eastern Cloud. Northern Lands also has its own entrance."

Ye Chong understood the crux of the matter immediately. "This means that we can enter the other two countries from Darkniss?"

"Theoretically speaking, yes. However, we don't know where the other two entrances are. Besides, it's easy to lose your way in Darkniss. It's easier to cross the border the usual way, even with the war happening right now. No one has tried to enter another country via Darkniss."

Sha Ya explained calmly. She was already used to Ye Chong's obvious questions. She had realized early on that Ye Chong was often oblivious to many things that people thought of as common knowledge, but familiar with deep and technical knowledge. She found it curious at first, but got used to it eventually.

Albinia and Lotesh doubtfully stared at Ye Chong. They never imagined that someone would actually ask something like that.

"What do we do with them?" Sha Ya asked Ye Chong again.

"Let them stay, and have them join the training. Start at the very beginning."

Ye Chong's orders changed the course of life of these two shooters.

That there were multiple entrances into Darkniss was important intel for Ye Chong. It meant that he would be able to access Western Frost and Northern Lands if he found their entrances.

That was the main point for Ye Chong.

Darkniss was full of natural resources, but it also had two fatal weaknesses. Firstly, Darkniss had no energy crystals. All production works would halt without them. The mechs they built would not be able to run without an energy source. Both Western

Frost and Northern Lands sold energy crystals at a very affordable price.

Secondly, Darkniss did not offer enough food. Ye Chong had brought a lot of food and nutrition pills with him, but they would run out one day. There were five thousand mouths to feed, and nutrition pills were too wasteful to be used for daily meals.

For now, with the war going on, Sun Sieha would not try to start a fight with Ye Chong. It would not be too difficult for him to enter Eastern Cloud for resupply, especially for these non-military resources. Moreover, Ye Chong's unique weapons might just earn him another huge sum.

However, once the war between Eastern Cloud and Western Frost ended, Sun Sieha would definitely start restricting Ye Chong's access to these important resources, and perhaps even direct national military force at him. It was hard to tell whether his five thousand strong security detachment was enough to take on the military by then.

If Ye Chong could find the other two entrances, his situation would be vastly different.

Ye Chong could head to Western Frost and sell a few pieces of good tech to even out the military strength between the two countries. If Western Frost could start to defend itself using the new tech, it might even be able to overcome Eastern Cloud. The war might come to a stalemate eventually.

That was the ideal scenario for Ye Chong. If he could sell some of his weapons to both countries, he would become the largest weapons dealer, hidden from plain sight. Ye Chong was not a money grubber, but he needed it to fortify his stronghold. Besides, all the resources required to train his five thousand men also translated to money.

Ye Chong could even consider recruiting soldiers from Western Frost to expand his army.

If that did not work out, he could always head for Northern Lands. That country was also rich in natural resources, and sold food products cheaply. In this scenario, Sun Sieha would find it hard to notice Ye Chong's presence, and it would buy Ye Chong more time to strengthen his position.

Ye Chong did not have definite plans in the long term yet. Whether he chose to enter deeper into Darkniss or to other areas, he would first need to have enough power on his side. This power would come not from Celest or Sha Ya, but his five thousand students. However, these students needed time to develop and mature, and that required a lot of resources.

Ye Chong had to see to this problem.

That Albinia and Lotesh could reach this place by foot meant that the entrance into Western Frost was not too far away. With Celest and its geopositioning system, Ye Chong did not have to worry about losing his way. Anywhere he travelled before would be recorded in the system.

Nevertheless, that would have to wait.

For now, Ye Chong faced the issue of the smelting furnace. Compared to the metal isolator, the smelting furnace was much easier to build. Ye Chong completed the machine in no time. He first designed the furnace structure on the photon processor, then sorted the mechanical parts of the furnace. After that, he used the Research Consortium's high precision processing equipment to build the mechanical parts. The last part was the assembly.

The final product was a 15-metre wide smelting furnace. The weaponsmiths were no longer so surprised by his creation. Humans are highly adaptable to new things, after all.

This was no ordinary furnace. Ye Chong had combined the smelting furnace with processing machinery. Thus, the machine could directly work on the products of the smelting process.

After the smelting furnace, Ye Chong needed to build metal strengthening machinery, high precision processing equipment, surface processing equipment ...

When Ye Chong was done building all the machinery, three months had already passed. By now, the warehouse was stocked with new metal blocks every day. All the purified metal pieces were simply stored inside as well.

At last, the full set of automated mechanical processing machinery was completed. This production line was powerful. It was the result of applying all of Ye Chong's knowledge. There were signs of influence from the Five Galaxies, He Yue Galaxy and even Gray Valley's Research Consortium.

The entire production line was approximately 1.2 kilometres long. All the machines were connected into an actual large scale production line. Any engineer from the Five Galaxies or He Yue Galaxy would be astonished by it. Such a large scale production line was usually owned by huge manufacturing companies only.

This was more than enough to build gadgets and machines for five thousand soldiers. In fact, it was enough for provide for 50 thousand soldiers.

Moreover, Ye Chong did not have enough technical experts with him, and he could not possibly spend all his time on the actual manufacturing. Hence, he designed the production to be completely automated. What Ye Chong needed to do now was simply to key in the desired procedure in the main control photon processor, together with other details like the shape of the mechanical parts to build and so on, and the production line will take care of the manufacturing.

Today, the production line began working for the first time.

Ye Chong keyed in the necessary details into the photon processor.

The metal pieces prepared earlier were moved via a conveyor belt to the mouth of the smelting furnace, and fed vertically into the furnace. After that, all the other machinery began to light up.

Xi Yan and the other technical crew watched the long production line nervously. The production line hummed and grumbled while the crew watched with anticipation. Ye Chong had spent three months to come up with this massive beast. They were all curious what the beast could do.

"It's coming out, it's coming out!" One of the young weaponsmiths pointed at the oddly shaped mechanical parts that were churned out and cried out excitedly.

Ye Chong picked up one of the black colored parts. It was a diamond-shaped armor for the limb of a mech, coated with a layer of black paint for protection. The entire mechanical part felt heavy in hand, with an excellent feel to it. Ye Chong tested the hardness of the armor with his fingers, looking satisfied with the outcome.

With this production line, he would soon be able to arm all his students.

Chapter 572: Nascent I

On the training ground, five thousand students fell in formation. They were as quiet as mice. All of them looked eager and excited. Their attention was fixated on the 100 mechs arranged in front of them.

Mechs – these were actual mechs!

Each mech was a standard 12-metre tall, in dark blue and ivory white. Black armour protected its legs. A plasma shield activator was installed on the left arm. Once activated, the mech would be shielded by a layer of plasma. On the mech's back were four foldable wings, which enabled the mech to fly smoothly within the atmosphere.

The huge figure of the mech did not look sluggish at all. Its lanky structure and compact design made it look powerful. The blue and white coloured laser gun in its hand was sparsely decorated with details. This was Ye Chong's preferred style.

If Mu/Shang was here, he would definitely recognize what inspired this mech.

Harmony of the Winter Aria – it was a mech that Ye Chong once used before in the Five Galaxies. Of course, only the mech's exterior mimicked the original. Ye Chong always found the Harmony a very excellent mech. It had many commendable features. There were the foldable bilayer wings, and the Hummingbirds, and the auto lock-on shurikens. Ye Chong had based many of his later designs on these features. As a close range mech, Harmony of the Winter Aria lacked some bite in its main body, but as a long range mech, it was perfect. Ye Chong kept the name of the mech for these simpler incarnations.

The most time consuming, difficult and expensive part of the mech was its laser gun. Called the G-ZS, it was an improved version of the G-Z, much powerful than its predecessor. The laser

gun was not made of alloy metal, but of one of the best wooden material found in this world – the Oceanic Cyathea wood. The body of the laser gun was in blue and white stripes, characteristic of the Oceanic Cyathea, giving a mysterious and expensive feel to it.

Another part of the mech that utilized high quality wood was the engine. Ye Chong spared no expenses in building these mechs. He used the best wooden materials he could find when wood was more suitable than metal. Hence, the mechs ended up with excellent specs.

Ye Chong did fit this mech model with anything weapons other than the laser gun and plasma shield, not because he was unwilling to, but because the students lacked the skills to fully utilize them. The more weapons there were to choose from, the more skilled the mech pilot should be. It was better to specialize than to learn bits and pieces of everything. Thus, Ye Chong gave each student a laser gun, albeit a very powerful one.

Ye Chong's expectation of his students was simple enough – they must learn all kinds of shooting techniques, such as sniping, continuous firing and suppressive firing. Ye Chong's own standards were much higher than in the Five Galaxies. His students would have to learn advanced military tactics, coordination strategies and so on ...

Hundreds of Harmony of the Winter Arias were arranged neatly before the students, like soldiers ready for inspection. In the bright lit training ground, the beauty of these mechs was fully displayed to the students.

They stared with their eyes wide open, breathing heavily. Even the more cool-headed Duan Qian and Shu Mo'er could not hide their yearning for these mechs.

Ye Chong watched his students, who reminded him of himself piloting Winnie a long time ago. Once, he had also longed to own a

more capable mech, just like them now.

Today, Ye Chong could not find that kind of longing in him anymore. As he continued to see more and more of the world, piloting all kinds of mechs and fighting more and more wars, he could no longer be truly surprised by anything.

Ye Chong thought of his days of wandering and fighting all these years, leading him further and further away from his ideal way of living, and felt a little bitter.

However, he quickly gathered himself. Looking at the eyes that burn with eagerness and longing, Ye Chong smiled inside.

"Your results are out. As explained earlier, students ranked in the first 100 will get their mechs ahead of the rest. The following are the names of these students."

The training ground was silent. All the students held their breath and listened.

First in the class was Appilok. This talented man had surpassed Duan Qian and Shu Mo'er later in their training, and became the first student to own a mech. Duan Qian and the Shu sisters were next in the list.

The students who were not in the name list could only watch the first 100 students jealously.

These 100 mechs were important in encouraging the students to study. They had studied knowing how cool it would be to be the first ones to own a mech. Young people were often naïve and impulsive. If Ye Chong had declared earlier that everyone would have their own mech, the students would not have worked so hard. After so long in the outside world, Ye Chong had learned to play tricks of the mind, something he would never have considered earlier in life.

With these mechs, the students improved quickly. However, this was also a vulnerable and risky period for Ye Chong. If they were

to be under attack by a large herd of wild creatures at this stage, they had only the stronghold's defense system to keep them safe. If the defense system was breached, the students could not be expected to fight the wild creatures.

Ye Chong had thought of coming to Darkniss by himself, but he rejected the idea in the end. It was simply too risky. He was especially wary of the red-tailed beasts. He had never seen those creatures singly, as they were always in packs. If that was the case, he did not stand a chance against them. Circumstances forced him to settle with training these five thousand young men to advance his plans. It would take longer, but his chances of success would be much higher. Ye Chong did not want to die before he saw Mu/Shang again.

Mechs were still continuously churned out by the production line, but for now, Ye Chong had to focus on grooming the students to become combat ready.

The students were quick to improve in their basic shooting training, especially for the Shu sisters, who were already shooters before they joined the program. The rest of them were not as advanced as the sisters, but they were also not unfamiliar with shooting. With their own mechs, their skills improved even more quickly. Besides, it helped that the training was so specialized and intensive.

Ye Chong then decided to divide the 100 students into 10 groups, and let them battle against each other. Of course, these mock battles were carried out with practice laser guns.

The gamified training routine was well received by the students. They enjoyed the battles very much.

Ye Chong thought of many ways to keep them motivated. He came up with a strict point system to rank the students according to their individual performance, and then designed a reward system based on these points.

As the whole reward system came into shape, things proceeded more smoothly in the stronghold.

Mechs were released in batches and given to students according to their scores. A month later, all students had earned their very own mechs. Currently, Appilok had the most points. His team had a winning streak of 121 rounds and counting, way ahead of the other teams. As leader of his team, Appilok earned more points than other students. Shu Mo'er and Duan Qian had more points from shooting practice, but their total number of points was behind Appilok's by a wide margin.

Appilok was an excellent leader.

There were quite a few students like Appilok. They were not good physical fighters, but they could keep a level head during combat and had a good grasp of the battle's flow. Often, their superior battles strategies led their teams to victory.

Ye Chong knew that this training could never replace actual combat experience.

So far, Ye Chong's commando troop consisted of 314 students. They performed well in all aspects of training, and were also outstanding in group battles.

Ye Chong decided to bring them out to experience real combat.

The only way to train real soldiers was through actual combat experience.

The commando troop moved out fully armed. While Ye Chong was gone, the stronghold was left to Sha Ya and Xi Yan. Ye Chong briefed them before he left.

Ye Chong flew in Celest. Behind him, 341 Harmony of the Winter Arias followed the bio-mech into the air, forming a fleet of combat mechs.

Down on the ground, the sputtering Lava River was only a thin red line. The students played around with their holographic

scanning systems to look around them. They were frightfully curious, since Ye Chong usually did not allow them out of the stronghold.

Behold, Darkniss! Why was it different from expected? Wasn't it rumoured that Darkniss was a very dangerous place? In the darkness, Darkniss was as quiet as a sleeping infant.

They did not notice a small opening in their formation due to their distraction. Ye Chong, who was feeling tense throughout the flight, saw it immediately.

"Concentrate. It's dangerous here."

Ye Chong and his commando troop were flying towards where Albinia and Lotesh came from. Those two shooters were currently drained from their physical training. They were shooters, and now they had to undergo a complete physical training program. Wasn't that simply exhausting?

Ye Chong did not bring them with him. It would be best if they could find the entrance to Western Frost in this run, but he would not mind if they did not.

It was half an hour into the practice flight, and they had no accidents yet.

However, Ye Chong was feeling more nervous. They were now entering uncharted territory. He had never gone so far this way before.

Chapter 573: Nascent II

Rui Bing looked at dojo before her. Her own combat dojo was now the largest in the entire Yi Ju zone. The students consisted of Sang Tribe members and people who joined the Yi Ju community. Rui Bing did not attempt to make the Rui Family's combat techniques secret. She was more open minded about these things after attaining Jie.

She still wore her signature white training garb. Her aura as a combat expert made her stood out from the other normal, gentle women. To the students in the dojo, she was the untouchable Goddess. The Sang Tribe felt this particularly strongly. Rui Bing's relationship with Ye Chong was no secret among the Sang Tribe members. Anyone who tried to get closer to Rui Bing would be taught an unforgettable lesson by the Sang Tribe.

The Sang Tribe members inherited Ye Chong's ruthless and cunning way of doing things. To them, the ends always justify the means. Even Sang Pu and Qiu Man did not discourage this mindset in their subordinates.

Rui Bing loved the Sang Tribe. They were a disciplined group of people. Even though they were now the only dominating power in Yi Ju Zone, they did not slack in their duties. The Sang Tribe members were like natural born warriors who were eager to absorb new knowledge. Their lives were very organized, and perhaps dry and uninteresting in the eyes of outsiders, but they enjoyed it very much. Their lack of knowledge did not allow them to control every side of Yi Ju Zone, but Rui Bing believed that given enough time, they would be the final winners.

She could feel the love and care from all the Sang Tribe members, all because of one man.

Rui Bing watched her students practicing in the dojo, sweating profusely, but her mind was elsewhere. Was her sister alright?

How was her mother doing now? Where was Grandpa Qian? What about the naughty little monkey, Wei Yuan?

What about him? Where was he right now? Was he okay?

Rui Bing sighed quietly inside, though her expression betrayed none of her thoughts.

More and more students joined her dojo. The people who came to the Sang Tribe for help in the midst of disaster now realized the importance of power. The Sang Tribe was also very passionate about combat. Their combat skills came from their experience fighting against wild creatures, designed to kill in the most efficient way. However, when it came to the overall system of their combat moves and its efficiency against humans, there was still much they could learn from the Rui Family's techniques.

Class was over. All the students bid farewell to Rui Bing. After that, Rui Bing tidied up the place. Even though she was now considered by others to be of high stature, she still preferred to do these things herself.

Now, she was going to visit Aried. Now that was an interesting fellow. He won a research fund from Qiu Man, and now had his own laboratory, located close to her place. Rui Bing was not used to living with other people. Since Sang Pu and Qiu Man were getting busier and busier with all the administrative and management work, Rui Bing had found a place of her own near the dojo. Later, she got to know Aried, who became her neighbour.

Aried was a short and petite man, but he had a loud voice. "Haha, Lady Bing is here." Aried looked completely different from his earlier abject life. He now looked like a bright and sharp old man with a perpetual blush on his cheeks. He liked the polite and kind young woman, despite her deceptively cold appearance. Aried was making some headway in his experiments. He was overjoyed by this, but he did not know anyone well enough, other than his students and Rui Bing, to share the good news. Thus, he invited

Rui Bing to visit his laboratory, to witness these moments that he thought would go down the history books as moments of triumph.

Standing respectfully beside Aried was his student, Sang Kan. At the moment, Sang Kan looked like an obedient and meek student, all gentle and courteous, but Rui Bing knew that all members of the Sang Tribe were powerful combatants, having lived in the Archipelago.

"Grandpa Aried, how do you do?" Rui Bing greeted Aried with a cold expression.

Aried did not mind her. He knew that she was only cold on the outside, but was in fact a warm and kind young woman on the inside.

"Ma'am," Sang Kan greeted Rui Bing, sending a blush onto her white complexion. Nevertheless, she acknowledged softly. All members of the Sang Tribe addressed her in this way.

"Haha, come in come in, we've been waiting for you. Sigh, to think that I would live to see this day! I can die happily now!" Aried sounded gratified. He had always been looked down upon because of his small stature, and became a social recluse because of this. Moreover, despite all the effort that he put into his research, people never acknowledged his work. Today, however, he had his own laboratory and incredible results to show the world. After decades of being scorned, he could finally prove himself. Hence, he felt the urge to share his victory, and thought of the one person he was currently close to – Rui Bing.

Rui Bing consoled him, "Don't worry about it. Your name will be forever etched into the hearts of the people."

Aried felt encouraged by Rui Bing's words. The thought of leaving a mark in history made him emotional.

Rui Bing and Sang Kan watched the emotional Aried and went thoughtfully quiet.

After a moment, Aried recovered himself. He blushed and said, "Well, let's get to it."

This was Rui Bing's first time in Aried's laboratory. She felt overwhelmed by all the complicated equipment inside.

Aried was prepared for his demonstration. All the relevant apparatus were already in position. A beautiful and complicated network of glowing blue circuits lit up the laboratory, giving it an air of mystery.

"We have built the first model capable of opening a spatial window, called the V-1. Currently, we employ spatial warp jump technologies that bring us from planet to planet, but the process is still time consuming.

"Long ago, I've begun to wonder if there are simpler ways for us to overcome our limitations in space and time. That is the basis of my theories. In our universe, under specific circumstances, we can create a spatial window, like a physical window in the wall, that connects two points situated very far from each other.

"Do you remember that battle? The one with the red-tailed beasts?" Aried felt excited, seeing Rui Bing listening to him intently.

Rui Bing nodded. "I do."

"Then you must remember the black circle that continues to expand. That is a spatial window, transforming in a strange way. Before that, I always thought my theory was only just that, a theory, but when I saw that spatial window, I knew that I was right."

Aried explained. His cheeks were flushed, and his hands balled into tight fists. Rui Bing did not interrupt him. She knew that Aried needed someone to listen to his story.

"Later, when I followed the refugees to Yi Ju, I saw Officer Qiu Man's funding offer and decided to try my luck, and ended up

winning the funding. It was like a dream come true. This was a hard won battle. From the first day the lab was set up, I began thinking about ways to implement my theories. Sang Kan and I tried everything, and finally came up with this machine, V-1, before you."

In the empty space at the centre of the laboratory was a machine.

On top of the rectangular base was complicated a V-shaped support structure on top, covered with many confusing photon circuits and nodes. The V-structure was nearly twice a human's average height. The rectangular base had even more photon nodes on it, blinking like the stars in the expanse of outer space.

"Alright, let's see what the V-1 can do." Aried, who was leading his audience, turned back to grin at Rui Bing. "Don't worry, it's perfectly safe. You can go closer to have a look. We've tried this many times without issue."

Sang Kan operated the V-1 with familiar moves. The complicated photon nodes on the rectangular base did not faze him. He tapped on the photon nodes quickly, knowing exactly what to do.

The photon nodes on the V-structure began to move. As Sang Kan continued to operate the machine, the photon nodes moved faster and faster.

Zip zip zip! On the two legs of the V-structure, the blue coloured glowing dots began to converge.

Suddenly, a black circle appeared silently between the two legs of the V-structure. The circle began to expand.

Rui Bing was familiar with this view. This was exactly like the time with the red-tailed beasts.

Rui Bing felt anxious, but seeing Aried and Sang Kan looking at ease calmed her down.

Finally, the circle stopped expanding when its radius reached about two metres wide.

Aried and Sang Kan heaved a sigh of relief. They had done this many times, but never with an audience. Having Rui Bing with them made them nervous. Fortunately, nothing went wrong. Sang Kan felt greatly relieved, despite what his calm appearance suggested. It would be so embarrassing if he were to screw up before Ye Chong's partner.

Aried turned to Rui Bing, pleased, like a child showing off his new toy. "What do you think? Not bad, right? I'm presenting this to Qiu Man tomorrow. We'll need time to figure out how to make out of this technology. This will lead to a paradigm shift in the spatial sciences." He added, "I'll be sure to call you over again the next time we have something new." Aried looked like a mischievous, innocent child.

He did not notice the black circle behind him suddenly expanding again, quietly.

Rui Bing noticed it first. She dashed forward and caught Aried's sleeve. Before she could pull him away, her vision turned black, and the circle swallowed her inside.

In the instant, Rui Bing lost control of herself, and felt a strange sensation unlike anything she had ever experienced.

The strange sensation did not last longer than a second. Rui Bing saw her surroundings changed instantly.

She was shocked, and turned around just in time to see the black circle behind her rapidly contracting. It happened so quickly that Rui Bing could hardly respond to it.

The black circle vanished silently in the air, leaving no traces behind.

Rui Bing stared at the empty space where the black circle once was, unable to understand what transpired.

"Ohh," Aried cried out in pain, having fallen to the ground, bringing Rui Bing back to her senses. Beside the old man, Sang Kan

was studying his surroundings intently.

"Where is this place?" When Aried calmed down, Rui Bing asked without delay. Beside him, Sang Kan seemed surprised but vigilant.

"Huh, what happened?" Aried stared around him, curious. "What is this place? How did we end up here?"

Rui Bing knew immediately that Aried could not tell her more. She described what happened in detail to Aried, hoping that the information could help him.

After she finished, Aried frowned and pulled at his messy hair, muttering, "Instability? What happened? What did it go wrong ...". He ignored Rui Bing's questions after that. Sang Kan quickly explained, "Ma'am, please don't expect any answers from him now. He's like that whenever he's thinking. He'll be back with us soon enough."

Rui Bing looked at Aried, absorbed in his thoughts, and decided to follow Sang Kan's advice. She began to study her surroundings. Safety was of the highest priority, now that they were in unfamiliar territory.

The purple mist all around her was very thin.

Rui Bing was taken aback by the purple mist. It reminded her of the one she saw in the battle at Yi Ju.

Sang Kan looked solemn and careful as well. He did not take part in that battle, but the Sang Tribe had been discussing it ever since it happened. He knew every detail of the battle, including the purple mist.

Nevertheless, the purple mist they were seeing here was much thinner than the one near Yi Ju.

For now, their priority was to figure out where they were.

Sang Kan carried Aried, and exchanged a look with Rui Bing.

They advanced carefully. Sang Kan left a marking of the Sang Tribe where they first appeared, so that they could find their way back.

The ground was hard, and the thin purple mist reduced visibility. However, both Sang Kan and Rui Bing had sharp eyes. This was a barren wasteland that harboured no life, only rocks.

Rui Bing asked, "What happened?"

"I don't know. We've done the experiment many times before, and never once did we encounter anything like this." Sang Kan was also vexed. They talked as they advanced quickly. Both had strong legs and could move quickly. Aried did not notice himself being carried by Sang Kan. He looked like he was in a trance, oblivious to his surroundings as he continued muttering to himself.

Sang Kan was obviously used to situations like this. They seemed to be moving quickly, but were in fact still holding back power in case of emergencies, allowing them enough time to react.

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Ye Chong had been careful, but they still ended up in a situation.

They encountered a pack of gold-striped black dragons. These creatures were very similar to the silver-striped black dragons, except in their skin colours.

The gold-striped black dragons were quick. They noticed Ye Chong and his fleet from a distance with their sharp senses.

"There are 62 of them! Be careful!" Ye Chong's loud cry initiated the battle.

The students panicked a little from the sudden encounter. A moment earlier, they were still enjoying the scenery in Darkniss. However, their harsh training kicked in quickly. All the mechs raised their laser guns and fired. Ye Chong frowned. Blindly shooting at the enemy was hardly effective.

Nevertheless, a few of the gold-striped black dragons were hit. They cried out in agony and fell from the sky. The rest of the pack flapped their wings and picked up speed. This change of pace surprised the students. Their shooting rhythm was thus disrupted.

Ye Chong understood immediately that he must bring the gold-striped black dragons under control, or the students will suffer heavy casualties.

From the first few moments of the battle, Ye Chong discerned that these gold-striped black dragons were much stronger than the silver-striped black dragons. The 314 mechs had only shot down five of the creatures and wounded another eight. If Shang were here, he would have laughed out loud at their achievement.

The dragons were quick, and moved unpredictably in the sky. Unless they were hit somewhere vulnerable, the creatures could still fight. They were obviously powerful creatures.

Creatures like these were the hardest to deal with.

Chapter 574: Nascent III

Ye Chong said, "Appilok, you're in charge." He then left the mechs with Celest. Appilok's personal combat skills did not yet qualify him as a member of the commando troop, but Ye Chong still brought him along. A commander needed actual combat experience as well. An experienced commander was more useful than a mech pilot, especially when they had a sizable mech squad.

Ye Chong did not have time to consider the details. He charged Celest straight into the pack of gold-striped black dragons.

Celest charged with determination, like a dagger driving itself into the heart of the enemy.

The gold-striped black dragons were infuriated by the open challenge. A few dozen of them flapped their wings and shot up higher in the sky, then folded their wings and dived down towards Celest.

Just when it looked like Celest was about to be charge straight into the pack, the bio-mech suddenly made a quick swerve, tracing an arc in the air, and graced past the dragons. The dragons missed their target and howled, and then shot upwards again.

Ye Chong had angered this few dozen of gold-striped black dragons. They broke off from the pack to pursue Celest.

Ye Chong's deceptively simple swerve had impressed his students. Celest had charged into battle with strong determination! All the students had thought that it would crash into the dragon pack.

It was, however, a feint. That sharp swerve was timed and executed perfectly. The gold-striped black dragons had missed their target by only a narrow margin. It was hard to imagine how their commander could time his move so precisely.

The students who followed Ye Chong in this operation were the

best of the five thousand, and felt proud of the fact. However, seeing Ye Chong's maneuver reminded them of what it really meant to be skilled. Whatever pride they had were squashed immediately.

Appilok was the first to react. He was alarmed when he saw the other gold-striped black dragons charging towards them, and ordered, "Our targets are everywhere, fire in all directions. Those who score higher than 90 points in sniping, fire at will." Ye Chong's swerve had given them the space to start shooting without needing to worry about friendly fire.

The students heard the order and reacted to it.

Ye Chong could not spare his attention for the students. He now had to face the pack of dragons behind him. There were 26 of them. These creatures were weaker than the red-tailed beasts, but still, Ye Chong had to be careful dealing with 26 of them together. Any misstep, and he would be defeated by these so-called weaker foes, and that was just not worth it.

Celest executed Slithering Steps, widening the distance between it and the dragons with its high velocity. The gold-striped black dragons would not give up so easily. They flapped their wings and continued to pursue.

It seemed that their efforts were rewarded. The dragons closed in on the bio-mech as they flapped their powerful wings. Their blood red eyes reflected their eagerness to draw blood.

It was long since Ye Chong had piloted a mech for combat. It was only now, in battle, that Ye Chong was reminded of his capability as a mech pilot. In that moment, he recalled how he once dreamed of owning a respectable mech and becoming a qualified mech pilot. The thought came and went in a flash. His eyes focused on the holographic screen. Right now, he felt so proud for having reached so far.

Ye Chong moved his hands across the control console without

hesitation. He had no idea how fast his hands were now. If the students saw how he was piloting his mech now, those who felt proud of their hand speed would be so very embarrassed.

Return Charge! Celest decelerated and turned back in only 0.9 seconds.

Ye Chong's vision blurred. Return Charge was a strain on his body, pushing himself to his limit. He did not panic, however. This was not his first time doing it. He just needed to wait for his vision to clear up. It would be over soon, and he needed to be prepared for the next step.

Ye Chong counted the milliseconds as the holographic screen appeared in his vision clearly once again. He could now see the panicking gold-striped black dragons on the screen.

Ye Chong's gaze sharpened. He typed in the relevant commands quickly on the control console. 10 slender fingers tapped the keys rhythmically like raindrops in a storm.

Celest's Return Charge surprised the gold-striped black dragons. They panicked, but since they were focusing all their energy on speeding up to chase their enemy, they could no longer move around as easily as before.

Celest charged with absolute determination, undeterred by anything in its path. In that short time, the weapons pack on its back delivered a lance into Celest's hand. Celest assembled the folded lance with its large mechanical hands. It charged at the dragons with the lance in both hands.

By then, Celest had reached the dragons.

The bio-mech dived straight into the enemies, who were still flying straight at it, unable to react in time.

Ye Chong assessed the spacing between the gold-striped black dragons in that short instant. He captured their positions, angles, and movements ... Then, his hands moved accordingly.

The blade glistened coldly!

In just a short moment, Celest's jet black archaic lance had torn through the throats of seven gold-striped black dragons. Behind him, a trail of blood mist followed. The bio-mech had chosen the optimal path of destruction.

Ye Chong was now a master in power control, timing and mech maneuvering. He was still as calm as he was before, but steadier and more mature.

The attack would not have been so destructive if his younger self had executed it. Ye Chong had gradually become better and better at this.

Celest shot through the dragons like a spear, but the lance was not all Ye Chong had to work with.

When Ye Chong charged through the dragons, he also released 19 auto lock-on shurikens.

The shurikens flew in the darkness like slithering snakes.

Sharp whistles penetrated in the air. The auto lock-on shurikens were fast, and produced a sharp whistle due to air friction. With 19 of them released, the shrieks were enough to send a shiver into the bones.

This was the main attack. 16 of the dragons were hit straight on.

Only three of them escaped narrowly.

The more attacks were made in a short instant, the higher the impact on the enemies. This series of attacks was achieved in that short instant when Celest charged through the gold-striped black dragons.

The rich variety of accurate and well-timed attacks was flawless.

The remaining three gold-striped black dragons were shocked by the turn of events, and flapped their wings in an attempt to escape.

Ye Chong would not let them. Celest traced another arc in the sky

and stopped one of the dragons. The scared creature was no longer fierce and powerful. It fell easily to a shot from Celest's laser gun.

The other dragons did not manage to escape as well. The shurikens cut them into shreds. All 26 gold-striped black dragons perished in Ye Chong's hands. None of them escaped.

Ye Chong was happy with the battle. He could feel himself improving, and more importantly, he could feel how powerful Celest was! Celest was an extraordinary mech. The battle would have ended so quickly otherwise. It showed especially in its agility and ability to execute sprints. Ye Chong had never seen another mech better in them. Celest had demonstrated its prowess in this battle.

Ye Chong directed his focus back to his students.

They had already gathered themselves after the initial shock. The 300 over mechs were now fighting against 36 gold-striped black dragons, without proper coordination. The newbies were weak, as expected. These were only gold-striped black dragons; what if they were red-tailed beasts? Ye Chong was not sure if the students could survive an encounter with them.

Nevertheless, he did not feel dejected. It was only to be expected that inexperienced mech pilots were weak. Once they grew familiar with combat, all the skills that they learned from training could be fully put to use. This process would not take too long.

They would need to go through at least 10, or maybe seven or eight real battles, to become an effective combat force. In a massive combat troop, personal battle prowess was not as important as coordination among the troop members. Lower level squad leaders must be able to assess the battle and attack rhythm, while the overall commander in charge must be able to assess the bigger picture of the battle accurately.

A troop with experienced mech pilots would be advantageous. This advantage would multiply by folds throughout the entire

combat troop. Besides, the pilots would be able to obey their commander's orders to the letter and affect the battle outcome.

Only actual battles could turn a mech pilot into a soldier. In this sense, the mech pilots in Ye Chong's starship fleet had all become soldiers, perhaps even elites. They had survived countless intense battles, especially when they were crossing the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. These fierce battles could help a mech pilot grow quickly, honing their minds to become stronger.

The mech pilots in the starship fleet were much stronger than these students. Ye Chong had to train the students from scratch, but he did not give up. If he could train the mech pilots before, he would be able to do it again. Besides, this was the dark and dangerous Darkniss. There was no shortage of enemies to fight against. Ye Chong's only concern was to make sure the battles were harsh and cruel, but did not result in too many casualties.

The students were now eagerly discussing the battle in their comms channel. That was their first battle, even though Ye Chong thought it was really not that much of a fight. They were 314 against 36 – was that really a battle? Ye Chong thought it was nothing to be proud of. After all, the mech pilots he first trained in the starship fleet could win with five against three when they were battling the red-tailed beasts. These students were still far off from the mech pilots there.

"Take it slow, no rush," Ye Chong reminded himself. His gaze wandered further into the depths of Darkniss.

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Rui Bing and Sang Kan treaded carefully in the thin, purple mist. This was unfamiliar territory. Who knew what monsters lived here? Sang Kan carried Aried, moving quickly. The Collision mech was only a recent mode of transport. Before that, the Sang Tribe were a hunter community.

He was better than Rui Bing when it came to stealth.

Rui Bing's expression was cold and unyielding, unfazed by the unfamiliar environment around her. She treaded lightly, like a gliding bird. Her snow white training garb fluttered in the wind. She was like a dancing swan, her expression clear and determined.

Both of them had incredible stamina. They ran for a full day and night.

The scenery around them changed gradually. The ground was now covered with light greenery, and the air turned moist. The greenery was actually moss. As they traveled further, Sang Kan found a source of water. Knowing how to test the water for safe ingestion was a necessary skill to survive in the wild. Sang Kan knew the drill. He used whatever he had on him to make a water container.

Rui Bing was not surprised with Sang Kan's skills. The Sang Tribe was similar to Ye Chong in many ways. They were survivors. What surprised her more was how Aried could live in his own mind for an entire day without drinking. Rui Bing found herself impressed with Aried. His commitment and passion were probably the reason for his success.

Rui Bing still had the nutrition pills that Ye Chong gave her earlier. She could not bear eating them before this, but now they would save their lives.

With the nutrition pills, food was not an immediate concern, so they advanced even faster. However, they both knew that it was a matter of time when the pills ran out. They would starve to death if they did not find an alternative source of food. However, they had not seen living creatures so far.

"What's this?" On the third day, they made a discovery.

It looked like skin shed by some cylindrical lifeform, about two fingers wide. Sang Kan had found it. The discovery was invigorating.

Rui Bing studied the dead shell. It was thin, semi-transparent layer in light purple, with wrinkles on it.

Sang Kan carefully nudged the shell gently. As expected, the centre was empty.

The two of them exchanged a look. Rui Bing shook her head to indicate that she had not seen it before. Sang Kan shook his head as well. Despite his wide hunting experience, he was always uncertain.

They continued their advance, but at a slower pace. The discovery was good news. Anything was better than an endless stretch of nothing.

The purple mist grew thicker, and this made them even more vigilant.

As they advanced further, more and more of the shed skin were found on the ground. Some were over a metre wide, and about seven to eight metres long. Humidity was rising as well, but the empty shells looked dehydrated.

Rui Bing and Sang Kang found something else.

A purple flesh column as thick as an arm planted itself in the ground, extending its other end into high up into the sky, as far as the eye can see. The higher it went, the thicker the flesh column.

"Red-tailed beasts!" Rui Bing and Sang Kan cried out softly in unison. Rui Bing's gaze turned sharp and deadly. The hostility was not without reason. The red-tailed beasts were humanity's greatest enemies. The number of people who were killed by these creatures was staggering.

After the great war near Yi Ju, plenty of the flesh columns were sent to Yi Ju for research. Rui Bing and Sang Kan both recognized it well.

Nevertheless, there was something different with this particular flesh column they were seeing. Unlike its solid and firm flesh

columns they had seen before, this one was dehydrated and wilting, like it could fall off the mother body anytime. Rui Bing and Sang Kan knew now where the shed skin came from.

Research into the flesh columns had always been important in Yi Ju. They hoped to understand this alien creature and defeat it. Research showed that the flesh columns were hardy creatures. As long as the core was alive, it would not appear dehydrated or wilted. The Sang Tribe called the powerful and regenerative mass of tissue the Flesh Nest.

Was something wrong with this Flesh Nest?

Just then, Sang Kan heard something. He cried out in alarm, "Something's coming!"

Chapter 575: Nascent IV

Rui Bing deployed Guardian immediately. She had watched Sang Kan the last few days and was confident of his abilities. Sang Kan saw Guardian, and quickly hid behind Rui Bing, carrying Aried in his arms.

Guardian was infamous amongst the Sang Tribe members. It was one of the most well known mechs for the Sang Tribe. Its capabilities were described to epic proportions. However, few had ever seen Rui Bing use it. As the Sang Tribe members were all deeply respectful of Rui Bing, no one dared to request a demonstration from her.

"It's all worth it if I can see Ma'am use Guardian," Sang Kan thought to himself delightfully. Once he returned, this would be quite the story to impress his friends. However, the thought reminded him of how the three of them had gone missing. Sang Pu and others must be searching for them by now.

The honest young man turned anxious. Their young teacher was still missing, and now even his wife was gone. What would happen now?

Sang Kan could imagine the chaos that transpired in Yi Ju right now. The more he thought about it, the more anxious he got. However, there was nothing he could do. He looked at Aried in his arms, deep in a trance, and sighed. If only it was just them. With Ma'am Rui Bing gone missing too, the situation had worsened many times over.

Rui Bing did not know how unsettled Sang Kan was right now. She was focused entirely on Guardian's black and white vision.

When Rui Bing entered Guardian, her vision was all white for a moment. Then, numbers began to run on the top right corner of her vision. Soon, Guardian's vision cleared up and became normal again.

Rui Bing relaxed. If Guardian could not be used in the purple mist, she would have to work with Sang Kan to kill the red-tailed best.

The statistics shown to her did not help her at all. Rui Bing focused on the white lines in her vision. There was purple mist everywhere around them, but through Guardian's eyes, the environment around her looked simple and clearer.

Soon, Rui Bing located the enemy.

As expected, it was a red-tailed beast!

Rui Bing's eyes flashed dangerously. She charged towards the creature fearlessly.

Guardian's dagger was a mighty weapon, but it had a silly name – Number Two's Dagger. However, every time she used this weapon, Rui Bing could feel the emotions behind these plain words. She did not know Gu Shaoze, but had heard of the miniature mech's origin from Ye Chong.

"I am your Guardian!" Rui Bing felt more confident every time she used this mech.

The wind whispered in her ears as Rui Bing charged towards the red-tailed beast like a gold asteroid. Her expression was focused, and her clear eyes hid a softness behind them.

Here in the purple mist, the red-tailed beast was highly sensitive of its surroundings. It noticed Rui Bing as well. The gold figure gave off an enticing smell. Its eyes glowed with want and hunger.

Red-tailed beasts loved metals. The better the properties of the metal, the more they liked it.

Rui Bing moved quickly. It was only expected from Jie experts. With Guardian amplifying her strength, Rui Bing was now as fast as the red-tailed beast.

Rui Bing stepped lightly. She was next to the red-tailed beast in

an instant.

...

Appilok panted heavily. The comms was flooded with the sound of heavy breathing. Even the likes of Duan Qian, who had better stamina than most of the students, were also breathing heavily.

This was their fifth battle. The 151 metalbeak falcons looked almost skeletal, but they were surprisingly tough, and more resilient than the gold-striped black dragons, which looked tougher than they actually were. None of the metalbeak falcons tried to escape, right until the last one that died in their hands.

This was the hardest battle they had so far. The four battles before this were all on a smaller scale. This time, even with Ye Chong dealing with 40 metalbeak falcons all by himself, leaving only 111 of them to the students, they still had a hard time dealing with the creatures.

They won in the end, but no one was cheering. They had suffered their first casualties. Five were dead, and seven heavily injured. Most of the students led normal lives before this. They had never been subjected to such a cruel experience.

They watched their comrades exploding into balls of fire, listened to their pained shrieks in the comms channel – these young men experienced the harsh reality of battle for the very first time. The ones who died were alive only yesterday, but were now irreversibly lost to them. The students grieved. Many of them began to cry.

Everyone was breathing heavily. They needed to recover quickly. Who knew when the next battle was coming.

No one blamed Ye Chong. He had done all he could. If he had not dealt with the 40 metalbeak falcons by himself, the commando troop would have lost at least a fifth of its members. They all understood that this was something they had to endure, having chosen their path as a soldier. Besides, they were mostly people of

great determination, and had eventually adapted to their situation.

The students looked at Celest. Their commander was strong! If they could all be as strong as their commander, this would never happen again! This was what the students thought as they gripped hands tightly into fists.

The students all believed that their commander was worth their loyalty. No one would have chosen this useless bunch of youngsters for this ambitious training. There were plenty of people just like them in Su City. They were scorned by others, and led mediocre lives. Even the nobles amongst them lacked a decent future because they did not have talent in parapsychic control.

It was their commander who changed their fates, who trained them and fitted them with mechs.

Who would want to train someone useless? Who would equip them with such luxurious weapons that rival even the equipment of the Royal Guards? As a descendant of the Bayer Family, placed in charge of Eastern Cloud's military logistics, Darren Bayer once did the math and concluded that the combined cost of all the standard equipment provided to a Royal Guard was not even enough to afford their laser gun. It showed how much importance their commander had placed in them.

Most of them even believed that their commander had brought them here into the never-ending darkness of Darkniss with the sole purpose of training them.

The commander had given the best gear, the best training, and had even led them personally into battles with all kinds of powerful creatures. That they could now be strong enough to fight against the creatures of Darkniss was all thanks to their commander.

They were only normal people, not even shooters. How could they not be grateful for him? How could they not love him?

It would be unforgivable for any of them to not train seriously, or to treat their duties lightly. Casualties were to be expected. Everyone knew how often shooters were hurt or killed. To have 10 Level 6 shooters born out of 100 Level 4 shooters was already considered remarkable. Of the remaining shooters, 40 would remain as Level 4, while the other 40 would die in combat. Shooters had to fight to improve themselves, and casualties were inevitable in combat.

"We're going to back to base."

Ye Chong's plain announcement was like music to their ears.

...

The red-tailed beast lay dead on the ground, a thin line of blood on its throat. Blood was slowly pooling around its neck.

Sang Kan was full of admiration for Rui Bing. As expected, Ma'am was as strong as their young teacher. What an impressive strike of the blade!

Rui Bing stored Guardian as Sang Kan quickly approached the red-tailed beast to study it.

The faint red tail told him that this was a young red-tailed beast, not yet evolved. It only had three fingers.

"No wonder it fell so easily," Rui Bing thought to herself.

Sang Kan took out his own dagger. Due to Ye Chong's influence, daggers became a popular weapon for the Sang Tribe members. However, they would only ever carry one made out of lavagold, mined from the Sang Village. Sang Kan began to dissect the red-tailed beast. He knew which parts were edible, and which parts were not. According to his experience, meat from the red-tailed beast was obviously edible, and should taste just fine.

Rui Bing was not used to the bloody scene. She quickly stepped aside.

Sang Kan worked through the flesh of the red-tailed beast, feeling regret for not bringing his Collision mech with him. With his mech, the red-tailed beast would not have been a threat. He had not kept the Collision mech's dimension keystone on him to prevent it from affecting the spatial stability in the laboratory.

Huh? Wait a second! Sang Kan's hands stopped moving. He felt like he had just realized something, but could not quite get a hold of it.

The dimension keystone! That was it! He finally knew why they were now in this strange new world! It was the dimension keystone! Rui Bing was wearing Guardian's dimension keystone! That must be the reason. Sang Kan was overjoyed by this realization.

Beside him, Aried was still in a trance. Sang Kan quickly went to him and shook him strongly, but the old man did not come out of it. Nevertheless, Sang Kan was experienced with this. He took the water container off his waist and splashed Aried on his head, ignoring the waste of drinkable water. Rui Bing watched him in puzzlement.

The trick worked.

Aried's eyes cleared up. He felt himself wet, and raged, "You monkey, Kan, you ruined my hair!" He self-consciously combed through the few remaining patches of blonde hair on his head.

"Old man, I figured out what went wrong with the experiment," Sang Kan offered excitedly.

"What?" Aried was surprised. "What was it?"

"The dimension keystone! That's why!" Sang Kan explained to Aried. "Madam Rui Bing had her dimension keystone with her. It must be the dimension keystone that affected the spatial window."

"Dimension keystone?" Aried gaped at Rui Bing. "Lady Bing, did you have your dimension keystone on you?"

Rui Bing nodded.

"Sigh, it's all my fault, I forgot to tell you. The dimension keystone is based on similar principles with the spatial window, but if they got too close with one another, there would be abnormalities. It's my fault for not telling you this." Aried looked vexed and dejected.

The three of them finally realized what went wrong. Even so, there remained the problem of getting back.

"D*mn! Something's headed our way again!" Sang Kan said in alarm. "It's too dangerous here, we must leave quickly."

There were 11 red-tailed beasts coming towards them.

Rui Bing took out Guardian again and charged towards the enemies. Sang Kan carried Aried on his back and followed from behind.

The gold miniature mech enveloped Rui Bing within. Her every movement was a blur of gold coloured shadow. Rui Bing knew that now was not the time to hold back. Besides, she felt nothing but hatred towards the red-tailed beasts.

Rui Bing rarely had to fight herself, whether it was when she was beside Ye Chong or on Yi Ju. Her strength was a mystery to most. Now that she was fighting with reserve, Sang Kan could only watch to his great astonishment.

She moved with the intent to kill.

11 red-tailed beasts were not too much of a strain on her. The dagger in her hand moved with a life of its own. If Ye Chong wielded his dagger like a venomous serpent, patient but deadly and with no stylish moves, then Rui Bing wielded her dagger like a swan flying across a lake, close to the water's surface, with effortless ease and grace.

These were two different styles, but with equal deadliness.

In just a short moment, all 11 red-tailed beasts had the same bloody line on their throats. As Sang Kan followed Guardian from behind, the 11 red-tailed beasts fell to the ground, blood spraying from their necks.

The three of them continued running through the purple mist, with Sang Kan leading the way. Rui Bing could not understand how he could figure out directions in this place.

Soon, Rui Bing and Sang Kan noticed something. The red-tailed beasts here were much weaker than the ones they encountered near Yi Ju. The creatures here were mostly three-fingered, with some two-and single fingered exceptions. The armor on their backs were a light gray, not the shiny black they were used to seeing. The flesh nests here looked like they were dying from a lack of water and nutrition. The skin on the flesh columns wrinkled from the lack of moisture. There were no flesh vesicles like the ones they saw in the holographic feed.

Rui Bing and Sang Kan did not understand the flesh nests well enough. If Ye Chong or Fei Si was here, they might have been able to glean something useful.

However, it was certainly good news that the red-tailed beasts here were weak.

Despite not encountering any strong red-tailed beasts, the three of them still decided to leave this place as soon as possible.

Chapter 576: Distance I

The journey back to base was not without difficulty. They encountered a few more waves of wild creatures, and suffered more casualties. Ye Chong did not interfere too much, as he decided to let the students do most of the fighting. His objective was to train the students. Being overprotective would not serve this purpose. As long there were no mass casualties, he would refrain from interfering.

This process of elimination was cruel, but necessary.

Once they were back to base, everyone felt relieved. In the next few days, Ye Chong did not bring them out for more battles. Instead, he ordered them to analyze their fights. The analysis process would help new soldiers mature faster, and help them understand more about teamwork.

The students had now experienced the cruelty of battles first hand. No one slacked in their roles. That would be like giving up one's life. When battling in groups, survival relied on more than just on individual strength, but also teamwork.

Xi Yan approached Ye Chong. "Teacher, all the backup parts for the mechs are done. What do we build next? The metals in the warehouse are piling up. If we don't use them fast enough, we'll have to build a new warehouse." Xi Yan was now the manager of the technical division in their base, leading a busy life.

Ye Chong took a moment to appreciate how plentiful Darkniss was. It was a huge metal wonderland, more than enough to satisfy the needs of five thousand people. All the liquid metal they harvested from Lava River was now starting to challenge the capacity of their warehouse.

The backup standard mechanical parts for all the mechs were completed, and still they could not use up the metal stored in the warehouse. Ye Chong never imagined that he would one day face a

problem of having too much metal in his hands.

He considered the issue, and then said, "Build armor for the stronghold's outer walls. Hmm, change all the support structures to alloys too."

"Yes sir," Xi Yan agreed readily. Indeed, a stronghold made of rocks was risky. To Xi Yan and his comrades, Darkniss was a dangerous place. Fitting metal armor to the stronghold was a sizable operation, but not as complicated as building mechs. It should not take too long for them. Besides, he would be able to solve the problem of overstocking metals in the warehouse.

"We might as well expand the stronghold while you're at it. Extend five kilometres outwards. Do this in stages, from one corner of the stronghold to the next." Ye Chong reminded Xi Yan of the precautions. Safety was always their utmost priority. When the modification work was underway, the stronghold's defences would be lowered. If any wild creatures decided to attack the stronghold while they work, it would very well be very fatal to them.

Xi Yan nodded in understanding.

Ye Chong thought of another problem. He asked Xi Yan, "How are they doing?"

Xi Yan knew that Ye Chong was referring to the technicians. He smiled and said, "Those guys are giving it all they got, they know it's a chance of a lifetime. Since Teacher has offered so much precious knowledge to them, they're learning as fast as their minds can take it."

"How's their progress?" Ye Chong asked.

Xi Yan considered the question. "Not bad, especially the younger ones. They learn faster. However, the others are more experienced, so they're ahead of the group. I think, though, the younger people have more potential, but it will take time to

nurture them."

Ye Chong nodded and thought about his assessment. He then said, "Divide them into groups of five, and allocate a lab for each group. If they need any materials, they can get them from you, but if they require equipment, have them figure it out themselves. Hmm, they'll have access to all the equipment available."

A laboratory needed a lot of equipment to be functional. Ye Chong hoped that the technicians could get more hands-on experience. They must first learn how to use the advanced equipment available to them, and then move on to building their own equipment. The latter would be hard, requiring not only a firm base of fundamental knowledge but also physical strength to tinker with nuts and bolts. Ye Chong did not expect all of them to reach this stage, to all become Masters. Instead, he hoped that this arrangement could help them absorb new knowledge faster.

Xi Yan nodded, understanding the reasoning behind Ye Chong's decision. "Alright, consider it done."

The battle analysis session was finally over. Ye Chong was surprised by the thick reports that the students handed in to him. They were doing much better than he expected. In the reports, the students pointed out the mistakes and oversights made during battle, and ways to rectify them. The analysis was detailed but holistic. Aside from a few minor things, Ye Chong found them to be perfectly acceptable.

Appilok, Duan Qian and Shu Mo'er had also handed a personal report each. Duan Qian and Shu Mo'er focused more on the details of the battles, but Appilok's lengthy report surprised Ye Chong the most. After he was finished reading it, he decided to make Appilok the commander of his soldiers. When Appilok was put in charge in their first venture outside, he had convinced the other students of his abilities. Had he had not made a few crucial decisions in battle, they would have suffered even more heavily.

In the next few days, tension gradually seeped out of the students' minds.

On the training ground, it was easy to identify which students who had seen actual combat and which did not. The former trained with more specific goals in mind.

Soon, Ye Chong arranged for another round of real battle experience. This time, Appilok was made leader. 100 students were chosen from the first commando troop, and were each in charge of five students who had never seen real battle. Ye Chong could not be there every time for his students. He must let go for them to learn to be truly independent.

600 mechs eagerly left the stronghold. They were about to experience the realities of actual combat.

Back in the stronghold, the students who were left behind trained even harder. They knew that their turn would come, and the only way to stay alive when it happened was to become a capable combatant.

Ye Chong, who stayed behind as well, went to his laboratory. He wanted to build a pulsed signal relay station, one big enough to cover the whole of Darkniss. Ye Chong was familiar with pulsed signal relay stations. Back on the trash planet, he had lived right beside one. Pulsed signal relay stations were the main medium and the fastest way for interplanetary information transmission.

There were many reasons to a pulsed signal relay station. The most important one was to keep the mechs connected to the stronghold no matter where they were. Another was the possibility to send out drones like the Hummingbirds to study Darkniss.

These were two practical and urgent functionalities that Ye Chong needed.

Pulsed signal relay stations were not too much of a challenge for Ye Chong. The technicalities were not an issue, and his stock of

luxurious and advanced equipment was definitely enough to build one.

The main issue he faced was power. After all, if the relay station was to cover the whole of Darkniss, it would have to send out and receive strong signals, and be active at all times. The operation was highly energy consuming.

Since Ye Chong did not have many energy crystals at the moment, considering that his students still needed them for their training, he would have to find the spatial windows that lead to Western Frost or Northern Lands soon. Eastern Cloud would be the last resort.

Even with limited amount of energy crystals, Ye Chong decided to go ahead with building the pulsed signal relay station. It was simply too important for the stronghold. As for the matter of restocking energy crystals, if Eastern Cloud was not willing to sell them to him, he would take them by force. Ye Chong considered the latter as a viable alternative. Even though he had grown familiar with Sun Sieha, he would not hesitate to rob the King.

Seven days later, a tall metal structure towered over the stronghold. The students watched with intrigue. The pulsed signal relay station was 135 metres tall, visible from afar. The red blinking light at the peak of the tower was like a beacon in the dark sky of Darkniss.

The pulsed signal relay station was not the handiwork of Ye Chong alone. Aside from the initial design, he had left most of the work to his apprentices. Ye Chong only needed to teach them how to use the complicated equipment. He would repeat his teachings to them for as many times as necessary. These people were the backbone of the technical division, and must be nurtured with care.

The pulsed signal relay station took longer than he expected to complete, but Ye Chong considered it worth the effort.

In the following days, Ye Chong continued to work on other projects. He built a good quantity of improved Hummingbirds. These drones were larger than the original version, and could fly longer. Each improved Hummingbird was fitted with a miniature holographic scanning system. The drone would be able to perform scans and send the result back to base.

The improved Hummingbirds allowed them to explore Darkniss on a larger scale. The drones cost little, and were easy to make. Since exploring Darkniss was a long term operation, the Hummingbirds were not fitted with any defenses. If it was to encounter an aerial creature like the gold-striped black dragon, it would most likely be destroyed. That was only a small trouble for Ye Chong. The Hummingbirds were used primarily to avoid human casualties.

Hence, Ye Chong took to building 100 improved Hummingbirds, and then released 50 of them into the wilderness. He also set up a comms station in the stronghold, and assigned some students to the place. Ye Chong was confident that he would uncover all the secrets of Darkniss with the improved Hummingbirds flying out there,.

...

Deep in the purple mist, Rui Bing and Sang Kan ran and ran. Rui Bing's Guardian still gleamed without blemish in its characteristic gold. Sang Kan carried Aried on his back and trailed behind Rui Bing.

For the past few days, the trio had left a bloody path in their wake.

Madam Rui Bing was strong! Guardian was strong!

Sang Kan had to give it to her. His help was not needed so far. The red-tailed beasts were not a threat to Madam Rui Bing at all. Most of all, Rui Bing had good endurance, never showing any signs of faltering.

Sang Kan was not afraid of the red-tailed beasts that came for them. Compared to the Beast Stampede, this was child's play.

This was Day Five. They had been running in the purple mist for five days. Sang Kan did not need a watch to know how much time had passed.

The red-tailed beasts here were not powerful. In fact, they were pitifully weak. The flesh nests did not look right too, but the three of them could not spare time to ponder on their observations. Their priority was to get out of the purple mist as soon as possible.

In the past few days, Rui Bing had killed many, many red-tailed beasts. This was probably why there were fewer of them attacking in the last two days.

Thus, they advanced much faster than before.

The purple mist was now growing thinner. It was encouraging news for all of them, and they hurried along the way. Aried was having the easiest time of the three. He was shocked at first, carried on Sang Kan's back, but had slowly gotten used to it. Mostly, he occupied himself with his own thoughts, and then went to sleep when he got tired.

"Sang Kan had wide, comfortable shoulders to rest on! What a good student I found myself," Aried mused to himself.

Rui Bing and Sang Kan both had good stamina, but all the running in the past few days was taking a toll on them. Rui Bing had to fight on top of running, and she was beginning to look tired.

On Day 10, they finally emerged from the purple mist.

Rui Bing and Sang Kan looked back at the purple mist, feeling very much relieved. Aried yawned indulgently on Sang Kan's back.

The three of them rested for a while, and then continued on their way.

The terrain began to transform again. Instead of an endless

stretch of flat land, there were now mountain ranges around them. Curiously, some of the mountains were bald, but others were covered with lush greenery. There was a sense of discord in seeing these mountains in between each other.

Rui Bing and Sang Kan exchanged a look, and saw the wariness in each other's eyes. The stranger a place looked like, the more likely it was to harbor strange things, and these strange things were more often than not dangerous to them.

Suddenly, they heard a scuffling sound from one of the bald mountains some distance away. There was a cloud of dust on that same mountain.

The two exchanged a look, and decided to investigate. They were near the dust cloud in no time. On Sang Kan's back, Aried yawned again and proceeded to nap.

When Rui Bing and Sang Kan went closer, they saw that it was actually two wild animals fighting.

However, both Rui Bing and Sang Kan, who were not frightened by anything they had encountered in the purple mist, found themselves alarmed by what they saw.

Chapter 577: Distance II

There were two wild animals fighting. They looked like panthers, but with a small patch of white hair on their forehead. Rui Bing and Sang Kan had never seen such a strong panther. These two were deep into the fight, too absorbed to notice the two human observers near them.

They were strong and quick, leaving holes in the ground wherever they fought. Even rocks around them were vulnerable. Just a single swipe from their paws could smash the rocks into pieces. The panthers dashed around like heavyweight mechs, shaking the ground beneath them.

One of the panthers was flung against a cliff. Huge rocks rained down from above, kicking up a cloud of dust everywhere. Through the dust, Rui Bing and Sang Kan heard roaring from both panthers, and the sound of rocks crushing. The low rumbling sounds of impact were terrifying.

Both panthers were facing off against each other in a fierce battle, but Aried was still snoring lightly on Sang Kan's back.

To their surprise, the fight between the two leopards did not end conclusively. After a stalemate that lasted for minutes, both animals left the field simultaneously.

When they were far away, Sang Kan heaved a long sigh of relief. "What powerful animals! Even back in the Archipelago, we don't see many that are so strong. Additionally, they look intelligent." The Sang Tribe was experienced in fighting wild animals. They had a better understanding of wildlife than normal people.

Sang Kan was complimenting the panther animals. He had seen many wild creatures, and hunted almost all of them, but never had he seen such powerful panthers. The Sang Tribe had always respected strong creatures. Of course, this did not mean they would hold back when fighting against said creatures.

Rui Bing said nothing. She was still nervous from their encounter with the two strong panthers. They had extraordinary strength and speed. Their intelligence made them terrible foes to deal with.

The two panthers also made Rui Bing and Sang Kan more nervous, despite having left the purple mist.

They advanced more carefully. Even though there did not seem to be many of these panther animals, who knew what other creatures lived here?

The long mountain ranges were interspersed with barren and green mountain peaks. This phenomenon did not scare them. Back in the Archipelago, there were much scarier things like strong gravity regions. Besides, there was nothing much they can do except to move forward.

They moved quickly but carefully, for fear of drawing the attention of native wildlife. These creatures could survive despite living near the red-tailed beasts. It showed how strong they were. They must be extra careful now, moving in the territory of these unknown creatures, or suffer the consequences.

Fortunately, with the dense foliage around them and Sang Kan's experience as a hunter, their problem of food and water was promptly solved. Sang Kan could always find some tasty wild fruits or other food sources for them. Rui Bing and Aried, both inexperienced in surviving in the wild, enjoyed their food.

They dared not build a fire to grill meat, to avoid attracting the attention of strong wild creatures. Those two panthers they encountered earlier would have been enough trouble to deal with, even with Rui Bing's Guardian. Besides, Aried could hardly defend himself. If it was just Rui Bing herself, she would not have needed to be so careful.

The mountain ranges stretched further than expected. They could only see mountains all around them. Every time they crossed one mountain, another would come into view. Fortunately, they

did not encounter anything stronger than the two panthers they saw earlier.

Their journey was long and uninteresting. They crossed the mountains day after day for three months, but still remained within the mountainous region. The weather changed unpredictably, being stormy in one moment, then windy in the next. Even Sang Kan was wet all over, much less his teacher, Aried. Rui Bing, however, had Guardian to shield her.

Soon, Aried fell sick, perhaps due to the rain. This put their travels to a halt. Aried was old. It would be dangerous if he was left untreated for too long. Since they had no medication in hand, Sang Kan had to find suitable plants in the forest to treat him.

Aried's temperature fluctuated wildly. He was now barely conscious. Rui Bing and Sang Kan worried for him. They found a cave and settled down.

...

Ye Chong kept a firm hand on the stronghold's expansion. The students took turns going out to seek battle, and the results were apparent. As more and more real combatants were produced, the overall battle capacity of his army increased significantly. From the highest casualty rate of 20 percent at the beginning, they were now able to reduce their casualty rate down to nearly zero. The students got more and more used to fighting. However, there were now only 4700 students left in the stronghold.

Currently, there would be students heading out for battle every day. They would bring back with them the animals that they hunted. The wild game was delicious, much tastier than the basic nutrition in the stronghold. As a result, the students became more motivated to head outside for battle experience.

With the aid of the improved Hummingbirds, exploratory work into Darkniss progressed quickly. For now, Ye Chong had already increased the coverage area by 125 times compared to when he first

started. However, the operation had also cost Ye Chong more than three thousand improved Hummingbirds.

Ye Chong did not find the spatial window to Western Frost, but he did find the one that led to Northern Lands. This was an important discovery, as it would directly affect the future of the stronghold.

The war between Eastern Cloud and Western Frost did not extend to Northern Lands. Ye Chong had already found seven shooters in Darkniss, and he had held them all captive. Without fighter aircrafts, the shooters were defenseless against their mechs.

Life in the stronghold was structured. Even though it felt a little dull to some of the students, most of them were happy with their current situation. They were living the dream of their lives, achieving greater strength through their own hard work and earning respect from other people.

They no longer had the look of naivety or impulsiveness. They were steadier and more trusting of each other, working together in a tightly knit team. While their individual combat skills were not as good as the mech pilots Ye Chong once led, they still qualified as real combatants.

The stronghold was expanded once again. It now looked completely different from before. Thick metal armor covered the outer walls. The buildings looked modern, including a tall pulsed signal relay station. Mechanical work stations were built in neat lines. The stronghold was interspersed with training grounds here and there ...

Su City looked like a small, backwards village in comparison. The students were proud of their new home. The shooters that Ye Chong abducted hated him at first, but slowly eventually warmed up to the power that lied within this mysterious stronghold.

Only the strongest could be at the top of the food chain. This was

the rule wherever one went, including Western Frost and Northern Lands. Those who were accepted to serve the strong would see their service as an honor. Learning was highly encouraged in the stronghold. The students interacted with each other frequently and openly. It was hard to find another place like this outside. Shooters usually kept their knowledge of parapsychic control to themselves. They would only ever discuss it with their students or people they were very close to. Here in the stronghold, the shooters could look up many theories on parapsychic control. Sha Ya told them that it was the work of their commander. Besides, Sha Ya herself had shared her own ideas generously with them. Thus, the shooters quickly fell in love with the place.

The fact was, open communication was very helpful in improving the skills of a shooter.

The only complaint the shooters had was the physical training. They could not understand it – why would shooters need to train their bodies? Every time someone raised the issue, Ye Chong felt like bringing them to Mei Wu, a Level 9 shooter even more powerful than Xuan Ning. However, considering their current circumstances, he would have to put the thought on hold. Fortunately, here in the stronghold, no one dared to disobey him. Even Sha Ya would diligently commit herself to physical training. She had seen Mei Wu's incredible skills, and so felt more driven to train herself.

Mechs were not suitable for these shooters. Ye Chong prepared Combat Spiders for them instead. These Spiders were smaller than the original model, and more flexible in motion. It was meant for a solo pilot, and fitted powerful weapons, a shooting system and a holographic scanning system to aid them. This greatly improved their capacity as combatants.

Never waste combat resources – that was Ye Chong's principle.

...

A thousand mechs fell in formation in front of Ye Chong. This was now a mature army with structured leadership. Through actual combat experience, the current thousand-strong mech army was formed. The other students watched jealously at their peers. Those students were personally chosen by their commander. They knew that this was a very important mission. Their commander would be leading them personally. It had been a long time since their commander took the helm. The fact that their commander had finally stepped up told them how important the mission was.

Besides the one thousand mechs, Ye Chong also had 10 Combat Spiders with him, led by Sha Ya. The rest were Transport Spiders, carrying goods. There was a massive troop of 800 Transport Spiders in total. The stronghold had enough resources to overwhelm their warehouse. They must find a way to exchange extra resources for other necessary goods.

Ye Chong decided to stock everything in the warehouse into the Transport Spiders.

The massive troop formation moved out towards the spatial window that led to Northern Lands.

Due to the combat exercises they were having all this while, nearly all the wild animals around the stronghold were wiped out. Where once there were animals popping out frequently, now it was simply quiet.

However, the students were already used to it. Two months ago, they had started to venture further away to hunt those delicious wild beasts.

The wild creatures of Darkniss were smart, and avoided the massive troop formation from far away. Those that survived their encounters with mechs panicked even more. They quickly moved further into Darkniss.

After seven days of flight, the troop reached the spatial window to Northern Lands. They had already set up surveillance devices

nearby. They would be able to see anyone who tried to enter Darkniss from here.

With seven shooters from Northern Lands leading the way, the troops maneuvered its way safely through the dangers along the way.

After 14 days of flight and on foot, they finally reached one of the cities near Darkniss, called Ganming City. Ganming City was famed for producing a kind of high quality wooden material known as Gan wood.

"The trading volume is too big. We need to discuss with the merchants first. I don't think there's anyone around who can take all we have," Jin Weidong said, looking worried. He was the strongest of the seven shooters from Northern Lands, the one with the highest reputation. He was also only second in strength to Sha Ya amongst all the shooters under Ye Chong.

Ye Chong's troops did not enter the city. They hid in the mountains nearby instead. There were too many of them, and would certainly raise a few eyebrows if they showed themselves. Besides, no one here had seen mechs before.

Ye Chong did not need to remind his students to set up their positions according to the terrain. This time, they were not facing vicious beasts, but more dangerous opponents – humans.

Three hours later, Ye Chong's students had the mountain under control. They set up a temporary signal station that covered a radius of 2500 kilometres around them.

Jin Weidong's advice was sound. Only tradesmen with large businesses can handle their request. Besides, the materials they wanted in exchange can only be obtained from such tradesmen.

There were not many large scale businesses in Ganming City. They would have to venture to further cities to find suitable merchants.

Chapter 578: Distance III

The Spiders could not be brought along, of course. Ye Chong settled for taking 10 shooters with him. The students had no dimension keystones for their mechs, and could not follow Ye Chong with the machines outside. 200 of the mechs lifted off and went high up into the sky. The mechs had protection systems that shielded their pilots from the thin atmosphere at high altitudes. The students flew a few hundred kilometres above the ground. Mechs were hardly visible when they flew only dozens of meters above the ground. Even shooters in their fighters could not extend their parapsychic waves so far out.

These mechs were put in touch with Ye Chong through their comms. If Ye Chong was in danger, they would dive from the above surprise the enemy. These 200 mech pilots consisted of the best shooters in the stronghold. Many of them scored 95 or above in their sniper training, and some had even begun to practice ultra-long distance sniping.

Ye Chong's safety was almost guaranteed with his bodyguards above him.

Ye Chong brought the 10 shooters with him and went on his way.

They did not linger in Ganming City. With locals like Jin Dongwei leading the way, their journey went along smoothly. In fact, Ye Chong's security detail was extravagant. Of the 10 shooters, the weakest shooter was Level 7, as most of them were Level 8. Sha Ya was already approaching a breakthrough. Her aura was intimidating, and even a short glance from her was terrifying.

When Level 8 shooters were approaching Level 9, their mental state would be strained. This would affect their personality and charisma. Xuan Ning, for example, was all gloomy and serious before he reached Level 9, but when he finally came through, all the suppression on his mind vanished.

Level 7 and 8 shooters were the strongest fighters that most people would encounter. Even the Royals and nobles rarely had many with them. Shooters were aplenty, but the strong ones were rare. It was plain to passers-by that the shooters protecting Ye Chong were strong. They could not help but wonder who Ye Chong was.

Fortunately, here in Northern Lands, no one recognized Sha Ya, or Ye Chong's identity would have been exposed.

Ye Chong did not know how much he was standing out right now. Sha Ya and the other shooters did not anticipate it as well. When Jin Dongwei and his comrades noticed the odd glances they were getting, they realized their mistake. However, when they look back and saw Ye Chong's indifference, they thought this was his intention all along, and did not speak up.

They did not now that Ye Chong simply did not care about how other people saw him.

Among all the shooters, Sha Ya was the only one who understood Ye Chong. However, she had problems of her own. She looked impatient, which was almost unheard of in strong shooters, known for their calmness. There was an urge in her gut that she could not resolve. She felt more and more pressured, and this made her agitated. She knew that she needed an opportunity, like the one when Xuan Ning was nearly killed by Ye Chong. However, Sha Ya lacked that kind of opportunity right now. This made her even more agitated, and the aura emanating off her changed as a result.

She was the strongest of the 10 shooters. Her aura was unintentional, but shocking. No one dared to stay within three meters around her. Even the Level 8 shooter, Jin Dongwei, kept his distance.

Being sensitive to parapsychic waves, Ye Chong noticed Sha Ya's condition, but he could not help her with it. Sha Ya was like a ticking time bomb that could explode at any moment.

The fact that Sha Ya was improving so quickly was directly related to Ye Chong. He had described his battle with Xuan Ning in detail to her, and then brought her into Darkniss, leading to their encounter with the powerful Mei Wu. Mei Wu's method of combat was curious to Ye Chong, but an important eye opener for Sha Ya.

Ye Chong's security detail of strong shooters had already put him on the spot, but Sha Ya's dangerous aura drew even more attention from the people around them.

When Ye Chong's group walked the streets, Sha Ya's dangerous aura silenced all the noisy bargaining sounds around them. It was only when they left that the people wiped their foreheads, covered with sweat, as they looked at the backs of the scary group of people before continuing on with their bargaining. Sha Ya was like a legendary sword of immense power, surprising anyone who had their eyes on her.

Ye Chong and his shooters advanced quickly, since people all gave way to the group.

They were heading towards Maroon City, the largest and wealthiest place in the vicinity. It was also an important city in Northern Lands, with strong military presence.

The journey to Maroon City cannot be made on foot. They would have to fly in aircrafts. Jin Dongwei and the other seven locals had retrieved their fighters from Ganming City's landing field. Sha Ya, Albinia and Lorest had to rent three aircrafts. Jin Dongwei footed the bill, for he was well-to-do and a generous man.

Ye Chong and Sha Ya shared their transport. Sha Ya's aura was unsettling to other people, but hardly an itch to Ye Chong.

Maroon City was much larger than Ganming City, and with more people. Aircrafts and fighters cut across the skies continuously. The landing field was busy. Ye Chong and his group had to wait for five minutes to get the all-clear for landing.

Maroon City's perimeter walls were made of a kind of dark red colored rock. When Ye Chong and his people finally touched down, they were just in time for sunset. The evening rays spilled over the rocks like raging fire.

Once they were in Maroon City, they could feel the life radiating from the place. The streets were wide, and full of people. There were more strong shooters here, much more than in Ganming City. Sha Ya's strong aura was still noticeable. Stronger shooters were more likely to appreciate the power and significance of her aura.

In terms of lavishness, Maroon City was comparable to Su City. The people dressed in excessive and luxurious fashion. Even the buildings looked extravagant. The hotel that Ye Chong and his group checked in was even more luxurious than Sun Sieha's quarters before he was made King.

Jin Weidong seemed to read Ye Chong's mind. He explained with a bitter smile, "Northern Lands is prospering. With the recent good weather, our people are able to live without worries. As our borders remain peaceful, the King and government officials take to indulging themselves in pleasure. This profligate lifestyle has spread throughout Northern Lands in recent years." The other shooters from Northern Lands were silent. This was their country. Even though they were unhappy with the Royal household, they were still concerned with the fate of their country.

Ye Chong nodded in agreement and made no comment. Western Frost was a cold wasteland, but its people were strong and resilient. Eastern Cloud always had an inclination for combat, and was now led by an ambitious King, Sun Sieha. While Western Frost and Eastern Cloud were now at war, the victorious party would definitely be coming for Northern Lands next.

All this did not matter to him, however. Northern Lands was a land of plenty, and that worked to his favor.

Ye Chong said nothing more for the rest of the night.

Early on the second day, Jin Weidong brought Ye Chong to the Yu Family's Establishment. The Yu Family was the biggest supplier of raw materials in Maroon City, and one of the largest trading companies in Northern Lands. Word was the family had a good relationship with the local military.

"Yu Family's Establishment" – these three words were etched deeply into the signage outside the building. There were no fancy introductions, but the sign left a strong impression.

The person who ushered them was a friend of Jin Weidong. When the man saw the shooter, he laughed. "Old Jin, didn't you go to Darkniss? How'd you find the time to visit this store? Did you found yourself something interesting?"

The man was warm and courteous. He had a supple body, with a small beardy patch on his chin that lent him a scholarly air. He was surprised by the sight of Ye Chong, surrounded by all the shooters, but quickly contained his emotions. "And this is?"

Jin Weidong smiled and introduced, "This is my master, Mr Ye. We're here to offer a large business with your establishment." He said to Ye Chong, "Sir, this is Mr Yu Changqing, one of the managers of the Yu Family, and an old friend of mine."

Ye Chong bowed in greeting. "Mr Yu."

Yu Changqing quickly returned the gesture. "Oh, let's not be too formal. Come in, come in." He gestured for Ye Chong and his guards to enter.

In the waiting room, Ye Chong seated down. Yu Changqing treated him with a very expensive drink – the Cleansing Sip. No details were discussed yet, but he could see that this was a very important customer.

"I'm here to sell this." Ye Chong never beated around the bush. He produced a metal block.

It was a rectangular block of pure metal that gave off a dazzling lustre.

Yu Changqing hummed quietly in surprise and took the metal block in his hands. He studied it closely and said, "I've never seen an ore so purified. The shape is angular, from processing, I believe." Yu Changqing sounded intrigued, but he was secretly disappointed. Was this the business that Jin Weidong was referring to? Pure ores like this were hard to find, and considered to be highly valuable. However, this tiny block was hardly a large business.

Ye Chong said, "Mr Yu, please evaluate the worth of this ore."

"Gravstones are rare, you can't find them easily in the market, but a pure like this is even rarer." Yu Changqing considered for a moment, and then offered, "This piece of gravestone is worth 500 thousand ao thereabouts."

"I see. How much can your establishment accept?"

Yu Changqing paused in confusion, then jolted eagerly. "Does Mr Ye have many of these gravstones?"

Ye Chong nodded without a word.

"How many more?" Yu Changqing asked carefully.

"Many."

"A thousand?" Yu Changqing tried again.

"More."

"10 thousand?" Yu Changqing continued to ask, feeling a little anxious.

"More."

"50 thousand?" Yu Changqing looked shaken.

Ye Chong finally stopped with his suspenseful single-word replies and nodded.

Yu Changqing inhaled sharply. He had never dealt with such a large transaction before. His heart jumped wildly.

Just then, Sha Ya turned abruptly to look behind her inside the waiting room. After a while, she looked away.

Yu Changqing inhaled deeply and turned solemn. "You are not joking, Mr Ye."

Ye Chong shook his head. "No."

Yu Changqing tried to calm himself down and composed his thoughts. "If we're talking about so many gravstones, we cannot offer a price as high as when selling a single item."

"How much?" Ye Chong asked.

Yu Changqing cleared his throat and said, "350 thousand for each item, at most."

"Alright." Ye Chong did not try to bargain.

Yu Changqing kept his ecstatic joy to himself. He then offered hesitantly, "We also hope to become Mr Ye's exclusive buyer." He explained, "If so many gravstones become available in the market so quickly, the price will drop. I believe that is not something Mr Ye would wish for."

Ye Chong nodded again. "Alright."

"As for payment," Yu Changqing continued hesitantly, "We can only pay in installments. Since the amount involved for 50 thousand gravstones is huge, we cannot produce so much cash in time."

Ye Chong shook his head this time, and Yu Changqing's heart skipped a beat. However, the former's next words brought a smile to Yu Changqing's face again. "I don't want cash. Your payment will be made in terms of other goods."

Ye Chong produced a long list of items for Yu Changqing.

The man studied the list meticulously up until the last item, and

then said, "This shouldn't be a problem. However, I need to discuss with the other managers to finalize our contract."

Ye Chong nodded. "Alright." He then left with his bodyguards to return to their hotel.

When they finally left the shop, Yu Changqing quickly returned to the waiting room. The empty waiting room now had another occupant. The man had long, narrow eyes and an aquiline nose. His expression was cold.

"Did you figure them out?" Yu Changqing sat down heavily and massaged his temples.

"They're strong!" the man with the aquiline nose said coldly. "All of them were at least Level 7. The woman is the strongest! She noticed me, even without using her parapsychic waves."

Yu Changqing was shocked. "That's impossible! How can she notice you without her parapsychic sense? Surely it's a coincidence?"

"The woman is strong!" The man ignored Yu Changqing. "Jin Weidong had also improved. What do they want?"

Yu Changqing recalled the items on the list. "Energy crystals, mainly. Food, and some other more expensive raw materials."

The other man looked suspicious. "What do they need so many energy crystals for?"

"I don't know." Yu Changqing shook his head. He could not understand them either.

"What do you think of the deal?" The other man asked.

"I think it's workable." Yu Changqing was calmer now. "Gravestones are rare materials. If we keep its supply under control, gravestone prices should not fluctuate too much. They're selling it cheaply, and they only want other goods in exchange. We benefit from both parts, and it's a huge sum."

The other man went quiet for a while before saying, "Discuss the details with them tomorrow. I will look into their backgrounds."

Yu Changqing nodded.

Chapter 579: A Brutal Fight

"That's the seventh." Lotesh whistled and smiled. The number of spies around them had spiked in numbers, and some of them were even trying to force their way in.

Lotesh thought they were idiots. No one would miss what Level of shooters everyone in the group was. They must be suicidal to attempt to break in. Besides, the intruders were all average amateurs; he could deal with all of them himself.

Unlike Lotesh, who was basking in his own ego, the other shooters in the hotel room looked concerned. Ye Chong simply looked calm. Things were progressing rather unexpectedly. Usually, people would hesitate to challenge a group of their caliber. Now, however, they were having close to a dozen spies around them, all of whom were incompetent.

Jin Dongwei and his experienced comrades could tell that was amiss.

Sha Ya abruptly opened her eyes, and spoke up with her hoarse voice, "Soldiers incoming." At the same moment, Ye Chong received a live feed from the mech pilots hovering high above him.

There were about 500 soldiers, looking ready for battle. The people in the streets looked shocked, and stepped aside to give them passage. Northern Lands had been peaceful for a very long time. The people had seen such a large military platoon in recent times.

"We're leaving," Ye Chong announced.

The shooters exchanged looks, and followed him.

"Kill the spies." Ye Chong's order was delivered in a plain but cold voice.

Jin Dongwei and his men prepared themselves, their laser guns out and ready to fire. Parapsychic waves radiated out from their

group.

The parapsychic waves from three Level 7 shooters and seven Level 8 shooters radiated out simultaneously like a deadly tsunami. The parapsychic waves were a warning for anyone who dared to move against them.

Spies who ignored the warning found a laser beam shot straight through their brains.

No one had seen such a rampant group of people before. The strong warning behind their parapsychic waves stopped anyone for stepping up to speak with them. Northern Land shooters had mostly felt complacent. Aside from those were determined to hone themselves, most shooters were not as mentally strong as their Eastern Cloud and Western Frost counterparts.

It was not hard to imagine what would happen when a flock of sheep were to be met with a group of vicious butchers.

Maroon City was an important city in Northern Lands. There were many capable shooters, at Level 7 or 8, in the area, but these capable shooters preferred to be more careful. They stayed in the background and watched, and would not get involved without good reason. To them, Ye Chong's group was a mystery, and too strong to casually mess with.

Ye Chong and his group exited from the backdoor of the hotel and ran. The 10 shooters stopped spreading their parapsychic waves, and the group vanished without a trace.

The people around the hotel dared not probe with their parapsychic waves for fear of retaliation from their aggressive opponents. Those were experienced with this kind of situation would realize that the best course of action for now was to do nothing at all.

The group ran along the back alleys. Their physical training back in their stronghold was now put to good use. The shooters would

not have managed to run like this before their training.

The back alleys twisted and turned. Soon, even Ye Chong could not figure out where they were heading. He was about to reach for a map of Maroon City when a few strong parapsychic waves encompassed them.

Sha Ya hummed coldly and lifted her laser gun. A single laser beam shot through the walls, and someone inside shouted in pain.

"You're good!" A low and solemn male voice commented from the shadows.

A few men walked out of the shadows of a building nearby. They were led by the man with an aquiline nose at the Yu Family's Establishment. He was now smiling coldly. Around him were half a dozen shooters, all studying Ye Chong's group without fear.

"I was wondering, who in the world could have 10 strong shooters as bodyguards? Never did I imagine that you are Eastern Cloud's Chief Weaponsmith, Master Ye." The man spoke slowly, looking pleased with himself.

"No wonder you have gravstones of such high purity. Tsk tsk, the Heavenly Gods have smiled upon our Yu Family! Compared to Master Ye, what's 50 thousand gravstones? I just didn't expect Master Ye to be so vigilant and decisive. Impressive! My presence would not have been required otherwise." The man with the aquiline nose was all compliments, but his eyes were shining with triumph.

"The soldiers are closing in on us," Jin Dongwei warned Ye Chong quietly.

It was obvious what the man with the aquiline nose was trying to do – he wanted to stall Ye Chong, and he had the right people to accomplish this. The shooters around him were all at least Level 7. When it came to an actual battle, they would not be a match for Ye Chong's group, but stalling the group would not be difficult.

As the soldiers came closer and closer, they could now hear the steady rhythmic sound of footsteps from behind them. Time was running out. The soldiers were only another turn away from Ye Chong and his group.

The man with the aquiline nose was pleased with himself. Everyone knew how powerful this Master Ye was. He was known as the best weaponsmith in the world. The man played an important role in emboldening Eastern Cloud to challenge Western Frost in an all-out war. Eastern Cloud encountered little resistance in the war because of their weapons. The country's cannon arrays were terrifyingly powerful. This outcome was all because of Master Ye.

If the Yu Family could get its hands on him, the Family would become a power of no equal in Maroon City. The city's military was already under the Yu Family's control. This man could potentially help the Yu Family overturn the current government and begin its reign over Northern Lands.

The man with the aquiline nose looked at Ye Chong with fervent eyes.

Ye Chong was unmoved by all of it. He slowly activated his comms device. The man with the aquiline nose had never seen the device before. He was curious but remained vigilant. He had enough strength on his side to stall his opponents, but winning was out of the question.

He needed just another half minute, and it would all be over.

"High explosive grenades, wide coverage!" Ye Chong said quietly and without much emotion, but the man with the aquiline nose could sense that something was wrong. He did not have time to consider the implications of Ye Chong's words, for a very powerful parapsychic wave had locked onto him in the next moment.

Sha Ya's eyes glowed intensely.

The man with the aquiline nose had been wary of his opponents, so he reacted quickly. He released his parapsychic waves as well. Two strong parapsychic waves superposed each other. The air around them turned unstable.

Jin Dongwei and his comrades were surprised. They did not imagine that the man with the aquiline nose was on par with Sha Ya. The other shooters on the enemy's side were also surprised by Sha Ya's strength.

Sha Ya had been trying to suppress her urge to fight for the past few days, but she could finally unleash herself now. Her opponent was taken aback by her willingness to fight, and immediately upped his game as well with his parapsychic waves.

It was an intense clash of wills between two powerful shooters! The air around them became unstable. Jin Dongwei and his comrades dared not unleash their own parapsychic waves.

These two Level 8 shooters were about to reach Level 9. There was a qualitative difference in their parapsychic waves. This trade of blows was truly magnificent. The particles in the air vibrated, creating a blurry vision for anyone within range.

Creak crack! The walls around them began to crack. The cracks spread out more and more like a spider web. Boom! A loud sound was heard. The walls around them exploded into pieces, spraying debris all over them.

The other shooters were caught in the aftermath. They dared not move, and could only stand still like puppets while tiny brick fragments were sent flying all around them, leaving lines of scars on their face and hands.

Sha Ya and the man with the aquiline nose were deep into battle when the students high above in the air received Ye Chong's instructions.

"High explosive grenades! Targets are grids H-36 to H-38. Wide

coverage attack."

The order was relayed to everyone in the squad. All the mechs adjusted their laser guns and locked onto their targets.

"On my mark." Appilok no longer sounded like a naïve young man. He was now calm and steady.

The students placed their hands over the control console and held their breath.

"Open fire!" Appilok howled.

Two hundred pairs of hands moved.

Countless photon grenades rained down from the sky.

When the soldiers realized what was happening, it was already too late. They had nowhere to hide. The high explosive grenades landed right on top of them. The alley ways were narrow, and the soldiers were marching close to each other. The attack was devastating.

None of them survived! No one would have. About 3000 spheric high explosive grenades landed in the five-by-70 meter region within two seconds. The attack was powerful enough to wipe out the place many times over.

All of this happened within two seconds. When the dust finally settled, nothing was left. No building or brick survived, much less a person. There was a massive hole in the ground, where the moist yellow earth was smeared with flesh and blood. It was an eerie and shocking sight.

The powerful explosion happened just nearby; of course the man with the aquiline nose heard it. He knew now what Ye Chong's words meant. He did now know where the grenades came from, but one thing was clear – the attack had turned the tables on them.

Jin Weidong and his comrades studied the man with the aquiline nose and his shooters with hostility.

Sha Ya noticed the emotional conflict in her opponent, and attacked without delay.

The man with the aquiline nose felt like he was falling into an abyss. Victory was so close, but he was suddenly condemned to defeat. The abrupt change in his position overwhelmed him, much more than the despair he was feeling right now.

He knew that he would not survive this. There was no chance of that. He could tell from the ruthless methods they had resorted to just now.

If that was the case, let them all die together! His gaze sharpened. He unleashed all the parapsychic strength he had in him without reserve.

Sha Ya paused in surprise, and then made her decision.

Ye Chong's eyes narrowed. His vision was filled with dancing blue lines that flashed into and out of existence.

Jin Weidong and the other shooters realized something was wrong. They sensed great danger approaching.

Boom! The man with the aquiline nose exploded!

His parapsychic energy propelled his body parts as they flew outwards like blades. In his final moments, he unleashed power that could only come from a Level 9 shooter! His parapsychic energy was now in solid form. The tiny pieces of flesh were flying faster than any average human could see.

Sha Ya felt the danger coming towards them. Suddenly, she cried out loudly and gathered all her parapsychic energy in front of her.

Everything in Ye Chong's vision seemed to slow down. He could see all the tiny pieces of parapsychic energy in front of him despite how fast they were moving. The blue lines in his vision stopped moving so quickly as well.

Ye Chong moved as fast as the wind. He intercepted two pieces of

parapsychic energies with his dagger. One of them was flying towards Jin Weidong's heart, and the other towards Lotesth's throat.

Cling clang! Ye Chong's wrist shook a little from the impact.

Sha Ya's hair stood up. Her eyes glared terrifyingly.

Wham! Sha Ya was sent flying backwards, three metres away from where she was standing. She received the bulk of the attack, and fell unconscious from the blow.

Stab! Shunk! Shluk! There were sounds of weapons going through flesh. The shooters on the side of the man with the aquiline nose suffered the most. Their bodies were covered with holes. Blood gushed out from various parts of their bodies. The light in their despairing eyes slowly went out.

What a terrible attack!

Ye Chong was the only who was unhurt. If Ye Chong had not blocked a few of the parapsychic energy pieces coming towards them, there would have been at least three deaths on their side. However, every one of them was now suffering from injuries of various degrees.

Sha Ya was unconscious as well. They had suffered a heavy loss.

Chapter 580: Darkness, or Light?

Ye Chong was rarely ever truly angry, but this time he felt p*ssed off. The Yu Family! His expression was still as cold as before, but his eyes betrayed the deep apathy that he felt towards his enemy. He lifted his head and looked towards a nearby corner.

"To think that Yu Ze was capable of such a powerful attack just before his death. As expected from the Yu Family's ace. It's a pity ..." An old man stepped out from the corner. He had white hair and wrinkles all over his face. Despite his obvious aging, his eyes were still sharp.

Ye Chong coldly studied his opponent. He could sense an aura from this old man that was similar to the one he found on Huang Baiyi. Huang Baiyi had a very unique aura that Ye Chong remembered very well.

The old man took a long look at Ye Chong and solemnly said, "No need to be nervous, Master Ye. I am Yan Zhongli. As a representative of Maroon City's Yan Family, I would like to offer a deal with Master Ye."

Ye Chong took a glance at Jin Weidong. Jin Weidong whispered by his ear, "The Yan Family is the second largest aristocratic family in Maroon City, second only to the Yu Family, although they have always kept a lower profile. Yan Zhongli is one of the famous elders of the Yan Family. His strength is unknown." Jin Weidong had a close shave with death today. If Ye Chong had not blocked that fatal piece of parapsychic energy towards him, he would have died for sure. Nevertheless, he was still injured. His left shoulder was punctured, and he looked very pale.

Ye Chong returned his attention to the old man. He was not afraid of him. The old man had an aura similar to Huang Baiyi, but he was still lacking compared to the mentalist.

"Our Family would like to discuss about the 50 thousand

gravestones that Master Ye was going to sell to the Yu Family. Our Family would like to establish a long-term business relationship with Master Ye." The old man was neither haughty nor humble. He seemed to be very capable in these matters.

"As for the terms of the arrangement, Master Ye will not have to worry. We will follow the terms that you have agreed with the Yu Family. What do you think?"

Ye Chong looked at the old man and asked about something else, "Have you started attacking the Yu Family?"

The old man did not look uncomfortable by his inquiry. "Master Ye reads the situation well. The Yu Family is wealthy, but they do not have a strong foundation. In fact, they had allocated almost all their best people in order to secure Master Ye. We expected Master Ye to have contingencies against this situation, but we did not expect them to be so overbearing. As such, we had to modify our plans. I believe the Yu Family should be taken down by now." The old man spoke with great confidence.

Ye Chong felt his heart went cold. Few people knew about the business between him and the Yu Family. That the Yan Family could know so much meant that they had a spy deeply embedded within the Yu Family. The Yan Family had plans, and the patience to carry these plans. They responded accordingly when things went south for their enemy. The Yan Family was truly powerful! Ye Chong's anger vanished quickly. He knew that with the Yan Family's capability, the Yu Family would be thoroughly wiped out.

Ye Chong took a long look at the old man, and then expressionlessly said, "Alright. The deal will be Ganming City." Ye Chong helped his fellow injured shooters up and led them away.

"We will be there." The old man's reply came from far behind him.

Ye Chong did not delay their departure. They left Maroon City as soon as possible. Maroon City was already in chaos, but the Yan

Family had started bringing back order to the city. "It is over. The Yu Family is over." Ye Chong thought to himself. He brought everyone out of the city without hesitation.

Back in the wilderness, the mechs that protected Ye Chong from the sky came down and landed. Ye Chong and the shooters went on the mechs and flew back to their temporary camp outside Ganming City.

They had just got out of a pinch, and the shooters were still shaken from their experience. Since they received treatment in time, they were now firmly towards recovery. Sha Ya was still unconscious, but Ye Chong did not worry to much. Xuan Ning told him that it was normal.

All the medication in their base came from Ye Chong. The medication he prepared via alchemy was very effective. The students and shooters all loved them.

The Yan Family was highly efficient. Three days later, they arrived in Ganming City with all the supplies they promised.

As a sign of goodwill, they offered an additional 20 percent of goods at no charge. Ye Chong was relieved to see all the supplies they got. There was also a handsome young man among the Yan Family's representatives.

Yan Zhongli smiled and made the introductions. "This is Yan Huan, of the Yan Family. I am too old to be travelling frequently. Yan Huan will be our point of contact for our business in future. Please take care of him, Master Ye."

Yan Huan bowed respectfully to Ye Chong. He was informed by the head of the family beforehand that Master Ye was not to be offended.

The exchanged proceeded quickly. Since there was simply too much supplies, Ye Chong could not move them all at once. Thus, Yan Huan rented almost all the warehouses in Ganming City for Ye

Chong to store his supplies. The lease was effective for three years, for Yan Huan was a shrewd businessman.

Jin Weidong represented Ye Chong in the business side of things. He acted diligently, prioritizing the interest of the whole over individual interests. He was also more familiar with Northern Lands.

Yan Huan proposed a new deal to Ye Chong through Jin Weidong. They would like to buy his cannon arrays, or similar technologies.

Ye Chong agreed without hesitation. He now had the means to mass produce items. If he did not put his production line to good use, it would only be a waste of space. Besides, Ye Chong found it easier to use metal alloys than wooden material to build the cannon arrays.

However, Ye Chong asked for something else in return. He wanted supplies, but also shooters, and Level 6 shooters in particular! Jin Weidong thought it was odd. What did his master want shooters for? In Darkniss, mech pilots were more useful than shooters. Even Level 7 and 8 shooters like them had limited power in Darkniss. In this new deal, it seemed that his master was asking for at least a few hundred Level 6 shooters. They all knew that their master was a strange man, but everything he did was for a reason. This request, however, was a mystery to them.

The Yan Family had a wide influence in their society. They agreed readily to the terms.

When Ye Chong and his people prepared for their return, all the Spiders were jam packed with supplies. Even Ye Chong's dimension keystone was filled to the brim. His dimension keystone had reached its storage limit for the first time. Even so, half of the supplies were still in the warehouses in Ganming City.

After dealing with the matter, Ye Chong let Jin Weidong and a few men stay back to look after the remaining supplies. He then led

the rest of the army back to their stronghold in Darkniss.

The trip back was uneventful. Ye Chong was happy with the fruits of their labor. They obtained the goods, and even found a long-term business partner. This would give them time to store enough supplies, especially energy crystals.

When they arrived at their stronghold, Sha Ya woke up. She had reached Level 9. Ye Chong was not surprised, but he offered his congratulations anyhow.

...

Rui Bing and her two companions continued their journey. She and Sang Kan were relieved to find that Aried was getting better already.

They walked for a long time, climbing an endless chain of mountain ridges. The further they went, the darker the surroundings. Daytime turned shorter, while nighttime stretched on longer.

Today, they reached total darkness. Darkness was always intimidating, but that was only true for Aried. Both Rui Bing and Sang Kan were strong-minded people who would not be fazed by darkness.

They continued their advance, hoping against hope. They did not know what laid ahead, but one thing was for sure - all the places they had been were suitable for human life.

Aried continued to think about how they could return to their world.

"We need to find a spatial window. The spatial dimension here is unstable. There must be another spatial window, somewhere. As long as we find that spatial window, our chances of returning will be improved." Aried said carefully.

"By how much?" Sang Kan asked.

Aried did not tone things down for his student the way he would for Rui Bing. He glared at Sang Kan and said, "From one in a hundred million to one in ten million."

Even Rui Bing was a little disappointed by the answer.

Aried noticed her disappointment. He hesitated for a while, and then continued, "I suspect that this is actually a world that leads to many others."

Both Rui Bing and Sang Kan looked to Aried.

Aried continued carefully, "Of course, it's just a hypothesis of mine. Hmm, a hypothesis that is not yet proven. The spatial dimension in this world must be lower than other worlds, that's why the spatial windows came to be."

Abruptly, Aried went off tangent. "We found red-tailed beasts here, right?"

Sang Kan nodded in puzzlement. "Yes. What's that got to do with this?"

"You remember how the red-tailed beasts first appeared. They came through spatial windows. So, I think that this is very likely the homeworld of the red-tailed beasts. They were able to reach the He Yue Galaxy through spatial windows. I don't know how many packs of red-tailed beasts there are now. Err, let's call them hordes. How many tribes of red-tailed beasts do we have in the He Yue Galaxy?"

"Seven. Six, now." Sang Kan's reply came quickly. He followed the topic closely.

"Right, there are six now." Aried continued. "This means that there are at least six spatial windows that lead to the He Yue Galaxy. Besides, if those are naturally occurring spatial windows, and if they were disrupted by interference, then they will reappear again after some period of time."

Rui Bing broke her silence and asked, "How long will that be?"

"10 years, 20 years, it's hard to say," Aried replied without much commitment.

Even so, his words were encouraging to Rui Bing and Sang Kan, who were both starting to tire from their journey. There were six gateways to the He Yue Galaxy alone. This was good news indeed.

As they entered this dark territory, the terrain became flat, and the darkness loomed ever more intimidatingly. However, Sang Kan found the place to be very similar to the Sang Family Village. With the exception of the high gravity zones, this place was too much like the Sang Family Village. Sang Kan also made himself some primitive weapons that were typical of the Sang Tribe. The weapons were deadly tools in Sang Kan's hands, for he was almost physically comparable to a Jie expert.

What awaited them ahead? Would it be darkness, or light?

...

The stronghold was still as organized as Ye Chong left it. The students were now carrying their battle practices deeper and deeper into Darkniss. The gateway to Western Frost was found, but Ye Chong did not plan to make use of it in the near future. He now had enough resources to last him awhile.

The metal alloy cannon arrays were built quickly. Not much technical skill was required to build this weapon. The alloy cannon arrays were exchanged for an endless stream of supplies. The stronghold warehouse was almost full. Expansion works for the warehouse continued every day.

Aside from the supplies, they also had new shooters. Who knew how the Yan Family got their hands on them? Ye Chong was certain that there must be some informants of the Yan Family mixed inside, but what did it matter? They would not understand his ambitions.

The shooters were all at least Level 6, and obviously military.

That was exactly what Ye Chong wanted.

Ye Chong built two more strongholds, one at each of the entrances to Western Frost and Northern Lands. Each stronghold was manned with 500 mech pilots. He must protect himself with his own men.

After completing these two strongholds, Ye Chong relinquished his conservative approach and began to push his way deeper into Darkniss. He took control of the few places he knew to be rich in metal ores. He also visited Mei Wu's dwelling, but did not find her there. Hence, Ye Chong had to bring the Spider back to his stronghold.

Ye Chong was not aware that his actions had thrown the natural territories of Darkniss's inhabitants into disarray. Animals moved in hordes to the inner parts of Darkniss. They were not as strong as the animals in the inner parts, but they made up for it in numbers. The millennia old boundaries in Darkniss were disrupted. A new era of chaos was imminent.

Ye Chong did not have the time to notice the movements of these wild animals. He now had enough resources in his hands. Besides the metal ore sites that Mei Wu brought him to, he also located a few more places rich in metal ores.

This meant that the plan he had in mind could finally be set in motion.

Chapter 581: You Are My Strength

Rui Bing and her companions came to a stop. In front of them was a meadow of some kind. This was not grass, not exactly. The hair-like plants were vertical and swayed lazily. Rui Bing and Sang Kan could not quite find the words to describe it. In the end, Aried came up with a name that they both agreed with.

Sea of Threads - exactly what Mei Wu called it.

"Something's off." Rui Bing quickly realized that something felt wrong around the Sea of Threads. She could not use her sensitive mental waves here.

Sang Kan asked, "What's wrong?" He excelled in strength and speed, but not in mental skills, so he could not detect the changes.

Rui Bing did not know how to explain it to him. In fact, she had never experienced anything like it. When Rui Bing deployed Guardian, she was shocked to find that her vision was simply an empty sheet of white, despite being able to see in the purple mist earlier on.

"I can't use Guardian here." Rui Bing's words sent a chill to Sang Kan and Aried. Rui Bing was the main combatant of the trio, and Guardian was key to their safety. If Guardian was of no use, they must not stay here.

It was impossible to imagine what would happen to them without Guardian if a threat showed up. Sang Kan and Aried exchanged a nervous look. They were not expecting this.

"Do we continue forward or not?" Aried asked slowly.

Sang Kan looked to Rui Bing, who was standing straight and still. Her white training garb flapped in the wind. Rui Bing stared at the endless Sea of Threads. It was quiet but for the sound of the breeze. Rui Bing could not help but recall the face of a cold, young man.

"When are you ready to marry me?"

"Marry? Why should I marry you?"

"You kissed me."

"I did not kiss you."

"You did."

"I didn't!"

"You did!"

"I did not kiss you, probably."

"You did!"

...

Words from the past came back to her. A red blush crept up Rui Bing's fair skinned neck. Rui Bing felt her cheeks turned hot. She took a deep breath in. Her tired body was suddenly filled with strength again. Emotions overwhelmed her. Rui Bing's gaze became clear and determined.

She looked into the distance and spoke softly, "Let's go!"

...

Ye Chong kept a tight rein over the stronghold expansion works. With enough resources in his hands, he began to advance further into Darkniss. They were camped near Mei Wu's cave dwelling. Building a small base had become a familiar task for Ye Chong's men.

It took only three days to complete the stronghold.

Close to the stronghold were piles of metal chunks. Ye Chong now had 27 liquid metal auto-extractors in place. There were also 13 metal ore sites and six mineral reserves under his control. Production never stopped at these places to provide Ye Chong with enough metal. He now had enough resources to become an independent force in the He Yue Galaxy or the Five Galaxies, and this was just the beginning of his mining operations. There were

still many resources that he had not begun harvesting. He had enough resources from the current production sites. The only expansion he had in mind was the rare mineral reserves. It would be a waste to mine resources without putting them to use.

The latest base, Stronghold 4, now had its perimeter cleared of wild animals. Armed with mechs, the students were now the dominant power in Darkniss. To the right of the stronghold entrance was a 10-by-2.5-kilometer field that they had cleared and flattened.

There were only smooth and flat rocks in this clearing.

The students had gotten used to seeing new and interesting things as part of their daily lives. They would not settle for their old, primitive lives ever again. Besides, Ye Chong took care of their families through certain channels. Their families received heavy monetary compensation, and this gave the students peace of mind. Thus, they continued to serve their commander with undying loyalty.

Their commander demanded more and more improvement from them. Their training became much harder than when they first started. By following the sequence of base training, actual combat, analysis, and finally, specialized training, they improved at an astounding rate. They could feel this improvement in actual combat. Wild creatures that were difficult to kill at first were now easy prey.

Nevertheless, they did not try to venture too deep into Darkniss. Caution was a quality that Ye Chong never stopped emphasizing to them.

In the 10-kilometer long clearing, a huge metal structure was slowly erected. The structure reached from one end to the other. The weapon-smiths worked on this structure every day.

Was their commander thinking of building a metal stronghold? The students were curious, but no one asked the commander

himself. They were not yet so bold. The engineering works continued, and the metallic structure grew from a simple framework to a complicated piece of technology. Everyone could see that the metallic structure was a huge and intricate project. This must be a huge and miraculous work of engineering - all the students thought so.

...

After 13 days of non-stop running, Rui Bing's lips began to crack. She looked tired, but the determination in her eyes did not waver.

They did not have much drinking water left, and had to ration it carefully. There was no water in the Sea Threads, but they must cross it as soon as possible. In the past 13 days, Rui Bing and Sang Kan never stopped running as quick as they could manage.

Sang Kan looked exhausted too. He had Aried on his back all this while. He was so tired even lifting a finger was hard work. However, he was as resilient as any member of the Sang Tribe. He never complained in the past 13 days.

The Sea of Threads had a uniform appearance. There was nothing else but the light blue colored threads. They saw no other creatures, and no source of water. This wide piece of earth sustained only one species of life - the light blue colored threads.

"Look!" Aried cried out excitedly from Sang Kan's back as he pointed in front of them with his trembling hand.

The terrain was changing quickly. They were almost out of the Sea of Threads! Sang Kan and Rui Bing were both invigorated by the news. They picked up their pace and ran for it.

After stepping past the last blue thread, Sang Kan finally yielded to his fatigue. His legs gave way and he fell face down. Aried cried out in surprise as he fell forward.

Rui Bing gathered the last of her strength and went to catch Aried in his fall.

The trio looked at each other, a tired mess, and smiled.

After some rest, Sang Kan struggled up to his feet to search for water. He could already sense the moisture in the air. There must be water close by.

Soon, he found a watering hole. It was a small lake. The surface of the lake was still as a mirror. Sang Kan was overjoyed. He found many animal footprints around the lake.

"This must be drinkable water," Sang Kan thought to himself. Nevertheless, as a safety precaution, he still checked the water for poison. To his delight, the tests showed that water was indeed safe to drink. He quickly helped himself to it. It felt wonderful to quench the thirst from so many days of running.

He took out his water pouch, filled it up, and was about to return to Rui Bing and Aried when something out of the corner of his eye caught his attention.

He bent down to inspect the ground.

He recognized whatever he saw, and ran as fast as he could to Rui Bing and Aried.

"What is it?" Rui Bing saw Sang Kan's expression and knew that he must have found something.

Sang Kan passed his water pouch to them and said to them with a funny expression, "I found human footprints! There are people nearby!"

"Ah!" Rui Bing and Aried gasped in surprise. The water pouch that was about to reach Aried's lips stopped moving abruptly.

"It's human footprints, I'm sure of it. They are by the lake over there, probably by a woman. Beside her footprints were many other animals footprints. I think she was being pursued by the animals." Sang Kan did not look too excited when he said this. To them, humans might pose an even bigger threat than animals, especially strangers.

The news came as a shock to all three of them.

Sang Kan added, "The footprints are fresh. They must have been left not more than two hours ago."

This was encouraging news. They did not expect there to be any humans in this place. They had thought that they were the only ones who were lost and trying to find their way home in this dangerous place. It was wonderful to know that there were other humans here.

Nevertheless, they did not immediately set off to find these humans, but took a rest instead.

Rui Bing sat up straight and closed her eyes. Her hands rested naturally on her folded knees. A Jie expert. For a Jie expert, this was the most basic and fastest way to recover. Sang Kan simply laid down and slept, snoring so loudly that even Aried felt like sleeping.

However, Aried kept his eyes open wide to keep watch for the group.

An hour later, Rui Bing opened her eyes and Sang Kan stopped snoring. Sang Kan carried Aried on his back as usual, but he secured Aried's position with a rope this time. He also had a spiral patterned wooden spear. The wood he found was so hard that he bent his lava gold dagger while making the wooden spear.

His steps were light and vigilant. Silently, he crept forward in a half bending position.

Rui Bing followed close behind him. She did not use Guardian for now.

They arrived back at the lake and refilled their water pouches. Sang Kan continued to study the footprints around them.

"I don't recognize the animal footprints here. We have to be careful." Sang Kan was an experienced hunter. This was obvious throughout their journey so far. Both Aried and Rui Bing trusted

his judgment.

The three of them proceeded carefully along their way for an hour when they heard the howl of a wild animal.

Howl! The cry echoed around them. The ground began to tremble, as if thousands of animals were heading their way.

Sang Kan and Rui Bing were both alarmed. Aried paled quickly.

In the valley below them, a herd of wild animals were running in a wild stampede. They looked like they were startled by something. The herd consisted of all kinds of animals. Some were so huge they reached up to 16 meters tall, and every step they took shook the ground like a heavyweight mech would. The smaller animals were all agile creatures. They leaped along the cliffs of the valley, making their way forward in powerful leaps.

"There!" Aried pointed towards the front of the stampede.

In front of all the animals was a small figure, running as fast as the animals.

She did not look particularly strong to Rui Bing or Sang Kan, but she was also much faster than normal people. However, her stamina was failing. She was beginning to slow down.

"I think she's carrying something like a gun on her back," Sang Kan said grimly.

The woman was slowing down. Her steps were getting uneven. Rui Bing and Sang Kan knew that she could not hold on for much longer.

"Save her!"

Both of them exchanged a look, and then rushed towards the woman.

However, the woman was more capable than Rui Bing and Sang Kan expected. She slipped into a narrow crack in the cliffs. The narrowest part of the crack could only allow three people in side by

side. The animals behind her were not fazed by her attempt. The smaller animals followed her into the crack.

The gun on her back slid down smoothly into her hands. She shot without aiming. Swoosh swoosh swoosh! The laser gun began to fire.

Within the crack, animals began to scream in pain. Soon, animal bodies began to pile up at the entrance of the crack. However, the animals outside continued to force their way in like they had gone mad.

"She's a good shot!" Rui Bing and Sang Kan looked at each other in surprise.

Chapter 582: Request for Connection

Mei Wu felt unusually calm. She understood the severity of her situation. Panic would only hasten her death. She never stopped shooting with her laser gun. The weapon made by the emotionless young man, Ye Chong, was powerful. She had gotten used to this weapon by now.

A quick mental calculation told her how many energy crystals she had left in her backpack. Mei Wu sighed. She would probably die here, today. She did not feel scared or panicked. Instead, she felt relieved, as though she had put down a heavy burden.

Suddenly, she thought of Sun Sieha and the times they shared together. A mesmerizing smile appeared on her pale face. The bloody chaos in front of her faded into the distance.

Who was that? Mei Wu sensed the presence of other humans, and quickly jolted awake from her reverie. She felt disgust towards herself. How could she be thinking of him at this time? She was an idiot! Mei Wu regained her calm and hardened herself again!

She carefully maintained her shooting rhythm as she reached out with her parapsychic waves.

There were three people! Two men and a woman.

They were fast! Mei Wu "saw" the woman jump 300 meters down from a cliff, and thought she was dreaming.

The young man carried an old man on his back and leaped down the cliff just as easily. Mei Wu was shocked.

These two people were strong, especially the woman in white. Mei Wu had never seen anyone like them. As a woman herself, Mei Wu knew that members of her sex were born physically weaker. It was after she reached Level 9 that she understood the importance of physical strength. Hence, she began to train her body.

These two people had far surpassed her in this regard.

Something else surprised Mei Wu - when her parapsychic wave reached the woman, she had looked up at her! Were they shooters? If so, where were their guns?

An even bigger issue presented itself - were they here to help her?

Sang Kan was familiar with this kind of situation. He leaped his way forward between the rocks on the cliffs. The spiral patterned wooden spear in his hand struck quickly, killing an animal with every attack.

His moves were simple and efficient. Sang Kan always hit the weak spots of these wild animals. It was obvious that he was experienced in fighting against wild animals. After all, he had never seen the animals here before.

Rui Bing followed closely behind Sang Kan. She did not deploy Guardian yet. The terrain was too complicated, and there were too many animals around them. Guardian's vision would be severely affected. The myriad of white lines and numerous statistics in her vision would have been more troublesome than helpful.

Sang Kan leaped up high in the air. A horned tyrasaur saw him, and jumped towards him as well. Its sharp teeth dripped with saliva that smelled of rot. Its eyes glowed viciously. Sang Kan reacted immediately. He bent his legs just in time to avoid getting bitten, and then kicked hard on the head of the horned tyrasaur.

Every member of the Sang Tribe was just as strong as Ye Chong. When Sang Kan kicked, the horned tyrasaur's brain cracked open, and blood gushed out.

The horned tyrasaur crashed heavily into the ground, and was quickly stepped over by the other animals behind it. The animal was stomped into a bloody mush.

Rui Bing's white training garb stood out among the wild animals. She treaded lightly among the animals like a white butterfly.

The trio headed straight towards the crack. They could only save

the woman by being there. Sang Kan and Rui Bing reached the entrance to the crack soon enough.

Mei Wu did not hesitate. She turned her laser gun to the side, leaving a small gap in the opening enough for one person to pass through. It was obvious that these three people were here to help her. This was encouraging news to Mei Wu. With their help, she might just survive this.

A horned tyrasaur saw the opening and went for the crack.

Suddenly, a sharp wooden spearhead went through its throat. Its body convulsed as its eyes turned dim. The wooden spearhead vanished, and the horned tyrasaur slumped to the ground like a puppet with its string cut. Sang Kan carried Aried and slipped into the crack, quick as a fox. Poor Aried had never seen battle like this. His aging face was now pale as a sheet.

Rui Bing followed swiftly.

"Who are you?" Rui Bing asked with five parts gratitude, three parts watchfulness and two parts admiration.

"Sang Kan." "Rui Bing." Sang Kan and Rui Bing introduced themselves briefly. They knew that it was important to establish trust quickly. "Aried ..." Aried spoke shakily.

"Mei Wu is grateful for your help. Your assistance will be repaid," Mei Wu said solemnly as she continued to shoot at the animals.

"Let's get this over with first." Sang Kan did not trust Mei Wu's words so readily. He said plainly, "Begin by telling us what is happening right now."

"I don't know." Mei Wu smiled bitterly as she continued firing. "The natural order in Darkniss was disrupted recently. Many wild animals started moving towards the inner parts of Darkniss, while the animals that lived deeper inside started to move outwards."

Darkniss. Rui Bing and Sang Kan exchanged a look. They finally knew where they were, even though the name did not ring a bell.

They looked at Aried, who shook his head too, indicating that he did not know the name.

"This is huge stampede. Think, did you do anything? Or did you take something?" Sang Kan asked calmly. He knew animals. A stampede as huge as this must be for a reason. Besides, these wild animals were clearly focusing their hostility on this woman.

"You think I did something?" Mei Wu's expression turned sour. No one dared to talk to her like this before.

Sang Kan ignored her indignation. He threw a cold look at Mei Wu. "I know about animals. They wouldn't treat you like this if not to avenge for something. Besides, all the animals are focusing on just you. There must a reason behind this."

Sang Kan continued, ignoring Mei Wu's look. "No need to glare at me. I'm just telling you what I know. If you don't care for your life, we won't bother to save you." Mei Wu's expression became unreadable. Sang Kan smiled coldly and added, "Don't try anything funny, or I'll kill you."

The Sang Tribe were never a people of kindness and generosity. Their leader, Ye Chong, was also a man who believed in only strength. Hence, members of the Sang Tribe were easily influenced by Ye Chong's way of doing things.

Mei Wu's chest tightened. She understood the warning directed towards her. The young man was cold and ready to kill, but the woman in white beside him was unreadable. Mei Wu could not figure her out.

Suddenly, a commotion started in the stampede, interrupting their exchange. The animals turned even crazier as they began to force their way into the crack without care for their lives.

The pressure on Mei Wu increased. One of the animals was able to breach her defense line.

Sang Kan darted forward and struck his wooden spear into the

creature.

Rui Bing summoned Guardian and stepped into the fight. The situation quickly got out of control, to everyone's surprise.

The battle turned bloody. Rui Bing and Sang Kan stepped in pools of blood. Inside the crack, the air had the stench of blood. The animals behaved even more crazily, perhaps due to the scent of blood.

In just a short moment, the crack's entrance was piled up high with animal bodies. Rui Bing and Sang Kan had to climb up the body pile to fight the animals. Mei Wu's gun was out. She had only one last piece of energy crystal left. Now, she could only watch quietly as Rui Bing and Sang Kan fought.

Mei Wu's retreat from the battle put more pressure on Rui Bing and Sang Kan. Sang Kan thought it was crazy that his wooden spear was still intact so far. The Sang Family had long battled against wild animals, and now Sang Kan used all the moves and strategies he learned to fight. His inhuman strength allowed him to easily stab into the flesh of these wild animals.

On the other hand, the woman struck fast but without much killing intent. Mei Wu found it difficult to believe that something like Guardian existed. Rui Bing wielded her two sharp daggers impressively.

Rui Bing focused on the battle. She had fought enemies as strong as these animals before. Compared to that fight against the Blue Crown Serpents, she had Guardian this time, which made it easier for her.

Rumble! The ground shook. Rui Bing quickly took a few steps back. The pile of animals bodies they were stepping on suddenly collapsed. The animals outside were pushing the bodies away. The four humans inside the crack inhaled sharply at the turn of events.

Rui Bing was so focused on the battle that she did not see a

blinking light in the top right corner of her vision. It was a hailing signal.

...

The armor for the warship's hull was almost complete. The amount of metal alloy it took to build the armor was staggering. Ye Chong had used up all the rare metals he dug up from a few mineral reserves just for these armor plates. Any piece of armor plate used on the hull could sell for a sky high price in the Five Galaxies of the He Yue Galaxy. This must be the most luxurious and expensive warship armor in the world. However, it also had the best defensive properties.

Ye Chong had done the experiments. Even a ship cannon would need at least 10 shots on the exact same location to breach the hull armor.

Once the hull armor was installed, the general shape of the entire warship was visible to everyone who could see it. The 10-kilometer ship length was decided based on the Sabre, the first luxury class Slan grade starship Ye Chong had ever seen. Back then, Ye Chong was so greatly impressed by the magnificence of the Sabre. Now, his people were feeling the same thing. They gaped and stared at the massive being, unable to believe their eyes.

The ship was massive even when seen in outer space, much less on land. It was an impressive and staggering view.

Suddenly, Ye Chong's comm device rang.

Ye Chong connected the device. His expression turned serious, and he rushed inside the stronghold.

Ever since the pulse signal relay tower was set up, Ye Chong organized a comms room just for it. Students in the comms room were responsible for connecting to and receiving information from the Hummingbirds.

"What happened?" Ye Chong entered the comms room and asked

without preamble.

The students quickly stood up in greeting. "We identified an unknown signal carrier and tried to establish contact with it. However, the other party has not responded so far" After a long period of training, the students now behaved more professionally.

"Unknown signal carrier?" Ye Chong's eyes widened. He had used public, unencrypted signals for his pulsed signal relay tower. This was because no one else in this world would use pulsed signals. As long as a device was fitted with a comms device, it would automatically search for pulsed signals in the surroundings, especially public ones. However, connection can only be established when both parties agreed to it.

Ye Chong asked in a low voice, "Can you get their location?"

"Exact location is unknown, but we have a general estimate. It's much deeper inside than the furthest we have been." A student replied.

Who could this signal carrier be? Was it from the He Yue Galaxy or the Five Galaxies? Was it from a starship or a mech?

"Keep requesting for a connection." Ye Chong gave the order without delay.

"Yes sir." The student replied. Everyone in the room could see that their commander placed great importance on this unknown signal carrier.

Ye Chong sat inside the comms room without expression. He stared unblinkingly at the connection request displayed on the holographic screen.

"Request for connection ... Request for connection ..."

Chapter 583: Breathe

Rui Bing focused on the white lines that danced wildly in her vision. The white outlines she was seeing were changing too quickly. She would not be able to follow them without full concentration. Guardian could move much faster than the average mech, but it was also just as hard to pilot.

The golden figure moved quickly around the wild animals, striking with flawless accuracy. Mei Wu watched in awe as the mech battled.

Wham wham wham! Something was ramming into the cliffs. A few savage mammoths decided to charge repeatedly at the crack, since the entrance was too small. The savage mammoths were over 15 meters tall. They usually moved slowly, but they were also powerful creatures that other animals avoided as best as they could.

The strong rock structures cracked, and then fragmented. Rock slivers fell to the ground, kicking up dust that shrouded the entrance of the crack.

Rui Bing and Sang Kan felt even more pressured. They had to slowly retreat from the entrance. There were too many animals coming at them. Sang Kan was beginning to feel sore at the hands.

Sang Kan was already covered in blood. His clothes were soaked in blood that gushed and sprayed out of the animals he killed. His ghastly hands looked like he had dipped them in blood. The ivory white wooden spear he used was red from one end to the other. Only the spiral patterns etched into the weapon allowed Sang Kan to keep a firm grip on it.

Seen from above, Rui Bing and Sang Kan looked like coral reefs that stopped the animal wave from advancing any further.

"What did you do?" Sang Kan screamed at Mei Wu. He had only

ever seen animals this crazy during the Beast Stampede, but that had natural causes. These animals, however, were clearly directing their aggression at that d*mned woman!

Even killing the pup of the leader of a herd of animals would not have incited this madness. Moreover, these animals were clearly of different species. That d*mned woman must have done something!

A killing intent rose in Sang Kan. If they continued with this, the old man, Madam Rui Bing and himself were most likely going to die here. Madam Rui Bing did not say anything about that, since she was a kind spirit, but how could he allow Madam Rui Bing and the old man to die here with him?

All members of the Sang Tribe were obligated to protect their good sir's wife. This was an unspoken rule, and Sang Kan knew that anyone of the Sang Tribe would not hesitate to offer their life for hers. If anyone was worth the lives of the Sang Tribe, it was their good sir and his family!

This was not a promise, but a belief - a very pure and simple belief.

Just as Sang Kan began to consider throwing the woman out of the crack, Mei Wu yelled, "I remember, I remember now!"

She quickly took off her backpack and emptied its contents on the ground. There were all kinds of things in her bag.

"I was drinking by the river when I saw a few animals fighting for this. I took it from them by force, and then a large herd of animals started coming after me. I don't know if this is the cause ..."

Mei Wu lifted a tiny object near her. It was shaped like a water droplet, and looked like something rubbery.

Rui Bing took a quick look at it and gasped, "Teardrop mineralite!" She had kept guard of Ye Chong's bag before, and had seen the things inside it. Hence, she recognized what this was.

"Ma'am, what is a teardrop mineralite?" Sang Kan asked

immediately.

"I don't know, but I've seen it in his bag before ..." Rui Bing replied quickly, just as she felt a sudden wave of attacks from the animals and had to refocus back on the fight.

Sang Kan felt invigorated by the news. "You mean the good sir's bag?"

Rui Bing nodded as she moved her hands even faster. The animals were pouring in more strongly. Rui Bing could feel her stamina seeping away.

Now Sang Kan had a dilemma. Anything the good sir kept with him must surely be useful.

However, the animals did not give them time to consider the matter. When they saw the teardrop mineralite in Mei Wu's hands, they got all riled up. Their eyes glared hungrily and greedily. For a moment, the attacks subsided.

Boom!

After that short moment of peace, the next wave of attacks came even more strongly!

The animals charged without bothering about the creatures whether they would be stepped on or their own safety. It was madness! All the animals, big or small, went crazy! The savage mammoths headbutted against the cliff, disregarding the wounds on their foreheads. The animals that were already in the crack pushed their way forward, while the animals behind them tried to step on the ones in front of them. At the front line, the animals attacked Sang Kan and Rui Bing, howling wildly. Their eyes glowed madly.

The entire valley was erupting with madness.

"Woman! Keep the teardrop mineralite out of sight!" Sang Kan felt like he could not hold on much longer. The animals, stimulated by the teardrop mineralite, were beginning to

overwhelm him.

"Should I throw it away?" Mei Wu asked panickedly.

That was a good idea. Once they throw away the thing that started all this, the animals would surely begin to fight each other for it. They would be able to escape safely.

Just when Sang Kan was about to agree, something else came up.

Aooo!

Low howls came from the distance. The mad animals suddenly quieted down, and then scrambled away like their lives depended on it. The creature that was engaging Rui Bing and Sang Kan abruptly turned back to escape. All the animals that were crowded around the entrance of the crack dispersed rapidly. The animals ran like they were scared of something. Many of them were stomped to death in the process.

Rui Bing and Sang Kan both looked alarmed.

This low howl was very familiar! On their first day in the mountains, they saw two black leopards fight. This howl was identical to the one they heard back then.

"Snowshade leopards!" Mei Wu looked even more frightened. Her face paled, and her eyes betrayed the despair she was feeling.

As the animals made their escape, the valley became empty all of a sudden.

Four snowshade leopards stepped majestically into view. The small patch of white hair on their foreheads matched them elegantly. They held their heads high as they observed the other animals scrambling away for their lives. Their eyes glistened with arrogance.

The other animals were obviously very afraid of these four snowshade leopards. They ran for their lives.

Caw!

A sharp cry pierced the air. A dozen gold colored dragons appeared out of nowhere. These dragons were similar to the gold striped black dragons, except that their bodies were gold colored. Their skin had a metallic luster. Their beaks and claws were long and sharp, and they looked half translucent.

"Gold Dragons!" Mei Wu muttered, her face white as sheet. What was it about this teardrop mineralite that drew so many powerful beasts?

Rui Bing and Sang Kan were not shaken by their appearance yet. They had never heard of the Golden Dragons, and did not know of their strength. More importantly, the crack was narrow. The creatures were close to 10 meters long and cannot hope to enter the crack. They had only to deal with the four snowshade leopards.

Nevertheless, they did not feel particularly lucky. These four snowshade leopards were enough trouble. They were quick, powerful and intelligent. Back in the mountains, they avoided these creatures because of their strength. There was no avoiding now, however.

"What do we do?" Aried asked, terrified. "Do we throw away the teardrop mineralite?" Sang Kan was asking the same question himself. If they threw away the teardrop mineralite, would the snowshade leopard and the Gold Dragons fight over it whilst they escape? That would be the best scenario for them. The teardrop mineralite was not worth their lives.

Sang Kan have given up all hopes to keeping the teardrop mineralite. If the snowshade leopards were not involved, he might have considered it still. However, he knew that their situation now did not allow it. They were barely strong enough to fight against these four snowshade leopards. He remembered clearly how strong they were.

Another loud cry broke the silence!

The four humans felt like their ears were being hammered in.

Aried screamed painfully and tumbled onto the ground with his hand over his ears. Mei Wu looked terrible as she covered her ears. Sang Kan looked shocked.

A red-tailed beast! It was a red-tailed beast, with six fingers! The creature hovered in the air with its angular head, and its back shielded with thick armor. Narrow, crimson eyes stared back without warmth. Its dark red arrowhead tail flicked attentively behind it.

Instead of being even more panicked, the sight of the red-tailed beast calmed Sang Kan. He knew now that they must not surrender the teardrop mineralite, no matter what. The snowshade leopards were still largely unknown to them, but this was a devil they knew.

Six-fingered red-tailed beasts were strong. Even their good sir and Han Jia could only manage a very close win. Sang Kan did not know their odds of winning, but even so, he would not throw away the teardrop mineralite. Red-tailed beasts were interested in only two things - rare metals and pure energy. Sang Kan and Rui Bing understood now why there were so many animals attacking Mei Wu.

Energy was the key to evolution for all the wild animals in this place.

If the six-fingered red-tailed beast reached the end stage of its evolution, they would never stand a chance to survive. Perhaps the other animals could evolve as well. Why else would they be so interested in the teardrop mineralite?

Sang Kan and Rui Bing were still puzzled. The red-tailed beasts they encountered before this all had only two or three fingers, much weaker than this one. Where did this six-fingered red-tailed beast come from? They had only ever encountered a six-fingered red-tailed beast during the war at Yi Ju. Their good sir was the one who faced the beast.

Now was not the time to solve mysteries. Sang Kan made his decision. He said, "Let's retreat further inside." Rui Bing and Sang Kan brought the other two people further inside the crack.

The further in they went, the narrower the space. Now, all they could do was hold the fort. Their position could only fit a single file. Mei Wu and Aried were almost squeezed by the sides of the crack.

Rui Bing had a moment to catch her breath and she saw the blinking request signal in her vision. She was taken aback - why would there be pulsed signals in this place? She accepted the request without thinking.

"Careful!" Sang Kan warned Rui Bing from behind her.

Things were happening quickly now. The four snowshade leopards were closest to the humans. One of the snowshade leopards suddenly charged into the crack. The other three waited outside, staring greedily at the red-tailed beast and the Gold Dragons.

The red-tailed beast and the dragons did not move from their positions. They were too big to enter the crack, and could only watch while the snowshade leopard went inside.

The other three snowshade leopards waited outside in a half crouch, vigilant and prepared. The red-tailed beast and the Gold Dragons were obviously cautious of the snowshade leopards, for they did not initiate an attack.

"Who are you?" The comm was connected, and a voice that Rui Bing dreamed of day and night for a very long time spoke to her.

Rui Bing froze like she was struck by lightning.

"Careful!" Sang Kan was watching Rui Bing closely, and was surprised to see her stop moving so abruptly. The situation was precarious. He quickly leapt into the way and struck out with his wooden spear.

In the narrow crack, the snowshade leopard charged towards them, as fast as a mech. Sang Kan was terrified by it. Nevertheless, he struck out with all his strength, determined to do what he must. The wooden spear shrieked as it cut through the air.

Crack! The snowshade leopard's front claws caught the spearhead. Sang Kan's spear broke into two.

Pow! Sang Kan flung backwards like a sandbag. His body scraped against the cliffs on both sides, smearing the rocks with blood.

At the tip of the spearhead was a tinge of red.

The snowshade leopard was surprised to find itself injured, and growled in anger. The black fur on its body went upright.

The creature leaped into the air without hesitation, aiming behind Rui Bing for the heavily wounded Sang Kan.

The sound of Sang Kan's wooden spear breaking brought Rui Bing back to the fight. Tears fell silently from the corner of her eyes. She could not afford to answer the comm right now, she had to save Sang Kan! Rui Bing pushed her feet back and lunged at the snowshade leopard!

"Who are you?" Ye Chong repeated his question, but there was no reply. Nevertheless, he heard clearly of the warning "Be careful!" and the intense fight that was going on. He also heard the other party's heavy breathing.

Ye Chong gestured for silence. The comms room was silent except for the clashing sounds and heavy breathing.

Ye Chong closed his eyes and listened.

The breathing sounded familiar ...

Where had he heard it before?

Ye Chong tried to capture the rhythm of the breathing, and the strangely familiar sound behind the breathing. Human breathing was like footsteps. They sounded the same for different people, but

he could always identify minute differences for each person.

Why would it sound so familiar to him ...

Ye Chong searched in his memory desperately. The sense of familiarity was growing stronger and stronger. He was this close to knowing the truth. He felt a very rare sensation of panic growing in him.

Ye Chong forced his heart to calm down.

Wait a minute! Besides the sound of breathing, there was also another sound - the sound of weapons clashing! Ye Chong closed his eyes to listen for patterns in this fierce battle.

The weapon must be something like a dagger ... That must be a slash ... A stab ... A parry ...

The movements slowly came to him, becoming clearer and clearer. A figure appeared more and more vividly in his mind.

Ye Chong opened his eyes wide.

"Rui Bing, hang on!" Ye Chong shouted through the comms, reaching straight to Rui Bing's heart.

Rui Bing's face was covered with tears!

Ye Chong turned to his students. They had never seen an expression like that on him before.

"Gather everyone immediately!" Their commander left the comms room with his order, delivered not with his usual indifference, but a strong desire for murder.

Chapter 584: Allow Me

Ye Chong sat in Celest's pilot cabin. His gaze was cold and ruthless. Behind Celest was a huge fleet of mechs. Ye Chong had brought all the mechs in the stronghold with him. He did not bring any shooters, since Spiders were too slow. He cannot afford to be slow.

All the students in the current stronghold, and all the students from Stronghold 2 and 3, had received the order assemble.

"There's a spike of animal activity in Grid Z-10." The report came quickly from the comms room back at the stronghold. They had released all the Hummingbirds they had.

The black colored Celest led all 4,500 mechs across the sky.

"Full speed ahead. Destination is Grid Z-10." Ye Chong gave the order without emotion to his entire army.

The army accelerated. The whirring sound of engines rumbled in the night sky. All the wild animals in their way quickly made their escape.

"What's the mission this time, do you know?" Duan Qian whispered his question to Appilok.

Appilok shook his head. "I don't know, but the Commander is in a bad mood today, so watch out." As a qualified leader, Appilok was sensitive to his surroundings.

"The Commander called for soldiers from the other two strongholds too. It's d*mn scary." Another student joined the conversation.

"Enough with the questions. Just fight the way you're trained to." Appilok warned in his low voice. He had been in this leadership position for awhile, and was beginning to develop a charisma of authority.

No one knew what their Commander intended for them in this mission, but they could sense that it was different from their usual training. This was obvious from the way they were flying their mechs. All this while, the Commander had taught them to be cautious, and to always keep an eye on their surroundings while flying at medium speed, so that they could respond in time. Now, however, the army was flying with maximum speed, charging their way through the forest.

The students were no longer amateurs like they used to be. They maintained formation despite flying at maximum speed.

As they got closer to their destination, Ye Chong noticed something was wrong. Below them, large herds of animals were running away in panic. This unusual sight caught the attention of the students as well.

Everyone felt alarmed, and braced themselves for the battle. Darkniss was no stranger to them. Those survived so far were not careless idiots. All the careless people were already dead. Besides, Z-10 was a grid they had not covered before, and that made it an extremely dangerous place.

The sight was shocking. Tens of thousands of animals were running for their lives, as though something was coming after them.

The students were all unnerved. They recognized many of the animals here, and some of them were powerful creatures that they hesitate to engage. Most of the animals were unfamiliar to them, however, and that them even more dangerous.

Ye Chong was the exception. He knew Rui Bing's strength. These animals would not have caused her much trouble. The truly strong creatures were further in front of them. Despite the fact, he felt invigorated knowing that he was that much closer to Rui Bing.

Celest accelerated, ignoring the panicking stampede down below. The students were worried about his safety, and quickly followed

him.

4500 mechs covered a large portion of the visible sky. None of the creatures challenged them in their way. Their journey was unexpectedly smooth.

Finally, they arrived.

Ye Chong saw a dozen gold colored Gold Dragons. When he saw the red-tailed beast, his eyes widened. Finally, he saw the snowshade leopards guarding the entrance to the crack. Ye Chong finally knew why Rui Bing could not afford to answer him earlier.

Both the Gold Dragons and the red-tailed beast noticed their arrival.

Ye Chong suppressed the murderous emotions he was having and delivered his orders coldly, "Draw them away. Be careful, they are very strong."

All the students were shocked. They had never heard their commander describe anything or anyone as "strong".

Celest immediately separated from the fleet and dived straight for the ground.

In just a short moment after Ye Chong's order was given, Appilok had already came up with the army's strategy.

He gave the order without delay, "All troops, target straight ahead. Fire!"

All 4500 mechs fired their laser guns in unison.

The darkness in Darkniss was lifted momentarily.

Celest landed under the illumination of the laser fires. The giant in black armour was as steady as a mountain. The red flower on its back looked beguiling in the light.

It was a magnificent sight, to have 4500 mechs firing at the same time. 4500 laser beams shot across the sky, directed at the 12 Gold Dragons and the red-tailed beast. These mech pilots were not as

accurate as shooters, but they made up for it in numbers by shooting all at once.

After the first round of fire, Appilok and his army retreated without delay.

They soon realized how lucky they were to have done so. Of the 12 Gold Dragons, only two were lightly injured. The red-tailed beast completely avoided the attack.

Nevertheless, both the Gold Dragons and the red-tailed beast were angered by this provocation. Caw! The Gold Dragons shrieked as they flapped their gold wings, and charged straight for the mechs. The students were surprised by how fast the creatures were. The red-tailed beast studied the mechs coldly and followed behind the dragons.

All the mechs retreated at full speed.

It was quite comedic in fact, to see a dozen Gold Dragons and a red-tailed beast pursuing an entire army of over 4000 mechs.

At first, some of the mechs tried to fire back at them whilst retreating, but they never hit the creatures. The animals could not fly as fast as mechs, but they were more agile in the sky. The fact that they could even their laser beams made the students realize that they should stop wasting energy.

Lucky for them that the Commander's orders were to draw the animals away, and not kill them.

Hence, the students stowed away their laser guns and ran for their lives. At maximum speed, Harmony of the Winter Aria was very fast. It was now a battle of velocities. The battle had reached a stalemate, but it was good news for the mech army.

However, they were also getting further and further away from their Commander.

Celest had landed at a good spot. It was standing right next to the crack. From here, it could look down inside the crack.

Ye Chong immediately stepped out of Celest and jumped down into the crack, withdrawing Celest back into its dimension keystone at the same time.

Rui Bing held on with all her strength. Her face was still wet with tears. She tasted something salty by the corner of her lips. It might be tears, or sweat. The snowshade leopard was too strong. In the narrow space in the crack, there was no room to dodge. This was a battle of physical strength. She was just a woman. Her arms were beginning to feel sore. Few men could compare to her tenacity.

Nevertheless, she must not give up. Behind her were Sang Kan and Aried. Sang Kan was still unconscious, and Aried could not fight.

More importantly, a voice had told her to hang on!

Hang on! She gritted her teeth and fought on, despite feeling her arms getting more and more tired, and despite her heavily sweat-drenched training garb. Her breathing was beginning to lose rhythm. It was like breathing in fire with every breath. Her legs felt so very heavy ...

Hang on!

The fight was intense. With every clash, Rui Bing felt her daggers slowly slipping out of her hands, but still she held on to them.

Time was passing so very slowly ...

Crash! Suddenly, a few rock splinters fell down from above. Then, a large figure followed suite, landing right in front of her.

"Allow me."

These two words were delivered without emotion. There was no anger, no emphasis, not even an inflection. It was as calm as she remembered it to be. However, these two simple words brought tears to her eyes once again. She bit down on her lips to stop herself from speaking. Her legs nearly gave way beneath her. She reached out with one trembling hand to support herself on the cliff

beside her, but refused to move her eyes away from the deceptively slim figure. Her vision was getting blurry, and she could only see blurry figure. She really wanted to see him clearly ...

Tears continued to flow down her cheeks.

Ye Chong crouched down with his hand lightly holding onto his dagger. He had saw Rui Bing's movements, and knew that she was at her limit.

For some reason, Ye Chong felt terribly murderous, like something he had been suppressing for a long time had burst.

The snowshade leopard sensed the strong killing intent radiating from Ye Chong. As a sensitive and intelligent creature, it now felt hesitant to attack.

The man and the animal stared at each other for a full 10 seconds.

"Guardian." This was Ye Chong's next sentence, brief and precise.

A hand covered with soaking wet white training garb passed an inconspicuous ring to him. Rui Bing said nothing throughout it all.

Ye Chong took the ring and put on Guardian. He was familiar with this part. There was a lot of sweat in Guardian, left by Rui Bing. This filled Guardian with a very familiar scent that reminded Ye Chong of many obscure memories from long ago that he had yet truly forgotten about. As Ye Chong put on Guardian, he was immediately soaked in Rui Bing's sweat. Rui Bing had fought a very difficult fight.

Ye Chong breathed in the familiar scent without expression.

The snowshade leopard studied the gold colored human in front of it. It was puzzled by what it saw.

Ye Chong did not give it time to figure him out. An emotion he could not quite describe was struggling inside him.

He made his move!

Ye Chong lunged like a bullet towards the puzzled snowshade

leopard, leaving an afterimage behind it. He was full of energy, and his attacks were more deadly.

Compared to Rui Bing, Ye Chong's attacks were more ruthless, direct, and powerful! Ye Chong was feeling murderous. His attacks had no room for mercy.

Ye Chong did not feint. His first move cut out a patch of black fur from the snowshade leopard. His second move was a dagger strike at the snowshade leopard's front paw. The snowshade leopard screamed in pain and froze.

Before it could react any further, Ye Chong kicked at the center of its soft belly. Ye Chong delivered the attack without reserve. It was an attack so powerful that the snowshade leopard's strong body was tossed backwards.

Aoo - The creature went silent before it midway through its painful howling. Ye Chong had chased after the snowshade leopard's body before it touched the ground, and left a bloody hole where the white fur patch on its forehead was.

Wham! The snowshade leopard that was still alive moments ago now crashed heavily into the ground, kicking up dust inside the crack. Its eyes slowly turned lifeless.

Everything happened so quickly that it was hard to keep up with the fight.

Mei Wu was flabbergasted. She knew Ye Chong as a weaponsmith. How could he be ... She turned her gaze towards the snowshade leopard's dead body, and thought it felt like a dream. When she saw a single person able to hold out against a snowshade leopard for so long, she already thought it felt surreal.

Now, she saw another person killing a snowshade leopard in under 10 seconds. Heavens! Was he even human? Mei Wu thought she must be going mad.

Rui Bing had calmed herself down by now. She was a Jie expert,

and had better control over her emotions than normal people. Aside from the fresh tears on her cheeks that she had not wiped dry, she looked like she always did. She did not care to wipe her tears, since Ye Chong's battle had had her full attention.

Her eyes showed how happy she was. She could feel Ye Chong's improvement since she last saw him. He was much stronger and faster than before. More importantly, he was alive, and standing right in front of her.

Before this, Ye Chong would not have been able to kill the snowshade leopard so easily. Just as Ye Chong knew Rui Bing's strength, Rui Bing also knew Ye Chong. She knew that he was strong enough to deal with their current plight. Rui Bing tried to regulate her breathing so that she could recover her strength quickly and help Ye Chong, no matter how little she could offer.

Rui Bing kept her longingness to herself and closed her eyes. Her expression became serene, and her breathing slowed down.

Given a little time, a Jie expert could achieve plenty more.

The mechs that were pursued by the Gold Dragons and the red-tailed beast suddenly scattered in all directions.

The animals were surprised - which ones should they go after?

In that short moment of hesitation, a few hundred mechs were still in front of them. They were two squads. The red-tailed beast chased after one of the squads, while the Gold Dragons went after the other.

When the other squads were out of sight of the animals, they all switched directions in unison.

"Assist the Commander," Appilok ordered with his low voice.

Everyone was feeling panicked. They had carried out the Commander's orders successfully, but now they were worried about his safety. 4000 mechs regrouped and headed towards where their Commander had landed earlier.

Ye Chong had killed a snowshade leopard, but he had also angered the other three snowshade leopards waiting outside. They charged towards Ye Chong without hesitation.

Bang! Wham! The three snowshade leopards were like three heavyweight mechs. They sped up inside the narrow crack. Rocks cracked under their paws. The sudden disturbance shook down some of the loose rocks from above.

Ye Chong bent his knees and leaned forward. He held both daggers in a cross.

Inside Guardian, Ye Chong's vision was filled with ever-shifting white lines. Even so, Ye Chong maintained his calm. The daggers in his hands never once trembled.

They were closer now! Closer!

Ye Chong opened his eyes.

With a soft yell, his knees straightened like a spring, and his body shot forward at an incredible speed. He was even faster than the snowshade leopards.

Where he stood before were two footprints deeply impressed into the ground.

The three snowshade leopards grew bigger and bigger in his eyes. He was fast!

Now! Ye Chong leapt and pulled his hands in. He crashed into the first snowshade leopard with his left shoulder.

The first snowshade leopard was sent flying backwards. It lost control of its movements and blocked the way of the other two animals.

The other two snowshade leopards reacted remarkably well. They did not slow down because of their injured companion, but instead leaped up towards the rocky walls on both sides. They bounced off the walls and barely avoided the first snowshade

leopard that was thrown backwards, slipping past their companion from both sides. The entire process was smooth and streamlined.

Ye Chong had landed on his feet by then. His curled feet pressed deep into the ground from the heavy impact.

At the instant Ye Chong landed, his leg muscles rippled like waves. This was the September Lan Family's muscle control technique! The energy from his feet, amplified further by Guardian, was terrifying!

Ye Chong flitted in a gold shimmer of light towards the two snowshade leopards, unafraid of them.

Chapter 585: Take Guardian

Ye Chong opened his arms to both sides and flicked his daggers up, tracing two shiny golden arcs in the air.

"Aoo!" The two snowshade leopards growled lowly, showing their teeth as they headed for Ye Chong. Their snow white teeth gleamed coldly against the dark. They twisted their bodies and narrowly avoided the two daggers, losing only a few clumps of black fur from the attack. The black fur that was cut off from them scattered into the winds.

Ye Chong knew that the upper hand he had at the beginning was only temporary. The fact was, his situation was dire. The snowshade leopards were strong creatures. They were quick and agile, with immense strength. He killed the first snowshade leopard easily because it was caught off guard, and because Rui Bing had exhausted much of its stamina. He would not have been able to kill it so quickly otherwise.

The other three snowshade leopards he was dealing with now were still full of energy. They were furious of the death of their companion. Ye Chong must now fight against three angry snowshade leopards. This put him in a tough spot.

He must stay calm. Everything slowed down around him. His thinking became clearer. The impact earlier had thrown back one of the snowshade leopards, but it was also left his shoulder numb. That was why the other two snowshade leopards avoided his daggers so easily.

These two snowshade leopards landed and growled lowly. They arched their bodies and stood one before the other, and charged towards Ye Chong like two bullets.

In that instant, Ye Chong saw every minute detail. He put his arms down and bent them, and then drew his elbows backwards against the heads of the snowshade leopards.

Bam! The snowshade leopards hit right onto Ye Chong's elbows and cried out in pain.

Elbow moves were powerful in all schools of combat. Besides, the snowshade leopards had run right into them.

Ye Chong sensed the impact of his attack on the snowshade leopards. They were momentarily frozen. It was the perfect opening. Given an extra tenth of a second, Ye Chong would have been able to kill both creatures with his daggers.

However, Ye Chong did not make use of the opening. Instead, he dashed forward and pulled his daggers in front of him into a cross. A golden cross appeared in the darkness.

Clang! It sounded like the clash between two metal weapons, but it was actually from the claws of the first snowshade leopard clashing against Ye Chong's daggers. The snowshade leopards had very strong claws.

The powerful impact combined with Ye Chong's backwards momentum sent a heavy blow to Ye Chong's arms. He felt a surge of energy into him and nearly stumbled backwards.

Ye Chong knew that if he lost control of his body right now, the consequences would be very serious.

When his feet landed on the ground, Ye Chong stomped heavily into the rocks and slashed the dagger in his right hand upwards. The snowshade leopard in front of him retreated quickly in response.

Next, the three snowshade leopards began to launch themselves against Ye Chong's defenses like three black bolts of lightning.

Ye Chong did not move from his position. He blocked all the attacks coming from the snowshade leopards.

The daggers swiped and slashed wherever Ye Chong needed them to. They clashed against the enemies with a metallic ring every time. The sounds of impact never stopped. In the darkness, fiery

sparks appeared all around Ye Chong that quickly disappeared.

The claws of the snowshade leopards were as tough as Guardian's daggers. The force behind the attacks from both sides caused sparks in the air.

The three snowshade leopards were smart. Even in the narrow space within the crack, they were able to move around easily. Besides, they could coordinate their movements with each other. That made things particularly difficult for Ye Chong. The three snowshade leopards took turns attacking him. They were fast, and attacked at an astonishingly high frequency. Every attack was powerful. Even someone as strong as Ye Chong found it challenging to fight them.

Ye Chong was completely absorbed in the fight. His mind was focused entirely on the swift attacks that kept coming at him. He was almost at his limit. Any distraction or hesitation on his part would most certainly lead to his death.

There was no joy or sadness in him. His body moved almost thinking. His hands, elbows, shoulders, knees and legs all moved flexibly as though there were no bones inside him. He executed all these impossible moves with ease.

They were fast!

Ye Chong's focused mind allowed him to see everything around him in slow motion. He must find the perfect timing and place to attack by studying the complicated array of white lines in his vision. This required a mind capable of fast calculations and a long history of combat, both of which he possessed.

The truth was, he was now at a disadvantage. On flat, open space, he could still hold himself against the three snowshade leopards and wait for his opportunity; but here in the narrow crack, there was no room to avoid attacks from the animals. In fact, he could not allow any attacks to get past him at all. There were people behind him that he needed to protect.

Ye Chong gritted his teeth and held on. His only option was to fight to the end. This was a battle of tenacity and patience. The first one to give up would lose.

Ye Chong moved his hands as fast as he could. Any opening on his side would only lead to more openings, and from then onwards he would be finished.

10 minutes!

Ye Chong maintained his incredible speed for that long. He performed perfectly. If his battle against the first snowshade leopard demonstrated his explosive offensive moves, then his battle now against the three snowshade leopards demonstrated his unyielding defenses.

His moves were all fast and strong, blocking all the attacks that came his way!

20 minutes had passed! Ye Chong's defense was still flawless. The three snowshade leopards never once breached his defenses.

Inside Guardian, Ye Chong's face was tinged in an unhealthy red. His eyes were opened wide, and his facial muscles were convulsing. Sweat rolled down his distorted face.

He was at his limit. He knew that if the snowshade leopards stopped attacking now, his legs would give way.

Nevertheless, he was not ready to give up just yet. Surrender was not in his nature. Even with his stamina nearly depleted, his mind did not lose its calm.

The snowshade leopards were also slowing down! As someone who was also sensitive to changes in the battlefield, Ye Chong did not fail to notice that as well. Snowshade leopards were strong, but not invincible. As the ones on the offensive, they were using their energy much faster than Ye Chong.

They were slowing down and growing weaker. They panted heavily and kept their eyes on Ye Chong, unwilling to give up. To

them, the teardrop mineralite was ...

The gold colored Guardian was like a machine, never resting for a second. The snowshade leopards had never fought against anything so strong and resilient. That was only natural, since they were at the top of the food chain in Darkniss.

The three snowshade leopards glared at Ye Chong from a distance. They were breathing heavily. They arched their bodies and stood side by side.

This d*mned gold figure was still right in their way in the middle of the crack.

Ye Chong was completely exhausted. His muscles felt like they were no longer his. He could no longer make his muscles ripple like before. Underneath his unwavering body, his legs were shaking very slightly, but this was not visible from outside the mech.

"D*mn! Muscle cramps!" Ye Chong thought to himself as his expression hardened. His legs had suffered the most during the battle. After all, he used his legs to absorb all the impact from the animals.

He had finally reached his limit.

Rui Bing had recovered some of her energy. Her eyes glistened with concern. She knew how difficult those 20 minutes must be for Ye Chong. A single snowshade leopard had exhausted her completely, but Ye Chong had to deal with three snowshade leopards at the same time. These three snowshade leopards had entered the battle in top condition.

Ye Chong was inside Guardian, so Rui Bing could not see his face. However, she could tell from his slowing movements that something was wrong. This made her worried.

She did not know that Ye Chong was already completely exhausted. To her, Ye Chong was unbeatable. Whether it was

before or at this very moment, be it in the Five Galaxies or in this strange new world, she had complete confidence in Ye Chong.

Even so, she was ready to assist him.

Fighting side by side with Ye was her favourite thing to do.

"Fire!"

Suddenly, the sky lit up in a dazzling laser display. In the blink of an eye, the entire crack was illuminated with laser beams. The three snowshade leopards vanished in the light without even the time to howl.

In front of Ye Chong was a neat rectangular impression in the ground. The hole was three meters deep. Smoke curled up from the charred rocks in the hole. The rectangular hole extended from in front of Ye Chong all the way to the crack's entrance. The cliffs on both sides inside the crack were also charred.

Ye Chong looked up and saw row and rows of mechs, each pointing their laser gun inside the crack. They were the ones who fired.

Ye Chong exhaled slowly and came out of Guardian.

Rui Bing saw his pale face and quickly stepped forward.

Ye Chong said, "We're going back. Take Guardian." He slipped Guardian's ring to Rui Bing.

Rui Bing accepted the inconspicuous looking ring with barely an expression, but her hands held onto the ring tightly.

"Good sir, this is teardrop mineralite," Sang Kan spoke up.

Only the Sang Tribe called him that. Ye Chong turned to Sang Kan, and saw him holding Mei Wu's backpack.

"You're from the Sang Tribe?" Ye Chong could not help but asked.

Sang Kan had just only turned conscious. There were still traces

of blood by the edge of his mouth. He bowed down and answered with respect, "Yes."

"Then you'll come with me."

"Yes sir."

Ye Chong trusted the Sang Tribe. Sang Kan was excited to hear Ye Chong's words. He did not think much of his injuries. The Sang Tribe were strong people. They had always been in a tough war against nature. The injuries he had now were nothing. Serving their good sir was an unimaginable honour.

Appilok and his soldiers did not descend from the sky. Ye Chong had always taught them to put their safety at the highest priority when in battle. They were never big on formalities.

Their reinforcement was timely. Any longer, and Ye Chong would have been in danger.

It was a marvellous simultaneous firing. Appilok had commanded all 4000 mechs to do so. The mechs all hovered right above the crack and arranged themselves in layers to ensure that the attack was powerful enough. Each mech shot at a slightly different angle, so that all 4000 mechs could fire into the crack that was only a few dozen meters long.

The effect was devastating, as was evident.

To ensure Ye Chong's safety, all the mech pilots that were firing closest to Ye Chong scored 95 and above in shooting.

It was a one-hit kill. Appilok was slowly becoming a mature and effective leader.

"Depart." Ye Chong did not linger. This was not the place to reminisce; besides, he was never one for reminiscing.

There was finally time to catch his breath. Ye Chong slowly recovered his energy. The battle just now was so intense that he barely had time to breathe.

When Mei Wu saw the mechs, she was astonished once again. She had seen many things today that felt surreal. Rui Bing and Sang Kan had already surprised her greatly. Then Ye Chong arrived, and she was even more shocked. It was hard to imagine how a Master Weaponsmith could kill a snowshade leopard, and later defended himself against three snowshade leopards for 20 minutes and survived without a scratch.

A flying giant ... Massive laser guns that could fire laser beams thicker than the ones a Spider could fire ... They seemed to be made of gravstones ...

Mei Wu felt like her entire worldview was overhauled.

Ye Chong did not ask Mei Wu about her involvement. He had too many questions that needed answering, but this was not the place to discuss them.

Celest's black figure was as solid as a mountain. Its half lidded eyes seemed to stare down condescendingly at the world. Rui Bing put on Guardian and rested her relatively small and slender figure quietly on Celest's shoulder.

Ye Chong carried Rui Bing and led his army back to their main stronghold. When they arrived, Ye Chong's first order was, "Have the two squads draw the animals to the stronghold."

Their stronghold was now heavily armed, unlike when it was first built. They could use their armaments in the stronghold on the red-tailed beast and the 12 Gold Dragons. It was the most efficient way to deal with the creatures, and Ye Chong was all for efficiency.

When Mei Wu saw the massive stronghold, she looked about to choke.

When was this place built? Why did she know nothing about it? It was just a stone's throw away from her cave.

She felt slightly comforted when she saw Sha Ya, a familiar face.

Mei Wu was once very confident of her own strength, but she now felt very tiny. "No, that's only because they are too strong," Mei Wu consoled herself so.

The 12 Gold Dragons kept a tight pursuit on the mech squad as the hundreds of mechs made their way back to the stronghold. The Gold Dragons were too frustrated by the chase that they followed the mechs towards the stronghold.

Once the Gold Dragons were within firing range, the stronghold's weapons fired without warning.

A dense web of laser beams engulfed the Gold Dragons.

"Are these really the ruler of the sky, the Gold Dragons?" Mei Wu watched silently as the 12 Gold Dragons were shot full of holes. She felt a chill creeping up her spine.

That was terrifying!

10 minutes later, the six-fingered red-tailed beast was also drawn to the stronghold. However, it was smarter than the Gold Dragons. It stopped itself right beyond their firing range.

"Enlarge the image." Ye Chong ordered.

The holographic screen zoomed in on the clearly figure of the red-tailed beast.

The dark red arrowhead tail was evidence of its strength. Six fingers - that was the strongest red-tailed beast that Ye Chong had never killed.

He remembered clearly that that six-fingered red-tailed beast was the leader of its "pack". He remembered that odd event clearly.

If a red-tailed beast could become the leader of a "pack", than what about this red-tailed beast?

Where did it come from? Was it a leader?

Chapter 586: Stronger

The six-fingered red-tailed beast was wary of the stronghold. It studied the stronghold from afar. After about half a minute, it turned back to leave.

Ye Chong was curious about where the red-tailed beast came from. Killing a red-tailed beast had no practical value for them now; it would be far more useful to find out where the red-tailed beast originated from. However, the animal seemed intelligent. Perhaps he should just kill it? If the leader of a "pack" of red-tailed beast was intelligent, then killing off the "pack" would be many times more difficult. Ye Chong was confident that he could kill the animal right now. His strength had mostly recovered. He could kill a six-fingered red-tailed beast using just Han Jia, much less Celest. Besides, he had also become stronger.

However, killing it would mean that he could not investigate where it came from!

After considering his dilemma for a few seconds, Ye Chong came to a decision.

Ye Chong gave his order without emotion. "Send a hundred students who scored 95 and above in mech piloting to follow the red-tailed beast. Report all observations back to base."

"Yes sir." Appilok immediately went to organize the mission. He knew the students well, and would know who were the best to send for this mission.

The mechs were already on standby. They took off from the stronghold and followed closely behind the red-tailed beast. A pursuit required good piloting skills. The pilot must have good spatial awareness and be able to predict the target's next move.

After making the arrangements, Ye Chong turned to his new arrivals.

"How did you get here?" Ye Chong looked at Rui Bing.

Rui Bing looked calm. She replied softly, "It was Aried. He was doing spatial experiments when an accident happened."

"Is everyone else alright? Did they find Mu and Shang?"

Rui Bing nodded, and then shook her head. "The Sang Tribe is alright. Yi Ju is developing quickly. They are all very busy. Did you and Mu and Shang get separated? Before I left, they still do not have news of Mu and Shang."

"We got separated in Gray Valley." Ye Chong explained.

Sang Kan could not help but interrupt them. "So you were in Gray Valley! No wonder we couldn't find you. Everyone was looking for you. We searched the entire He Yue Galaxy but could not find you. The red-tailed beasts have taken the Gateway to Gray Valley, so we did not go there."

Ye Chong nodded. He turned to Aried. "You are Aried? A spatial scientist?"

"That is correct, sir." Aried had heard of this man, so he knew immediately to be respectful. After all, the authorities in Yi Ju were his only sponsors.

"What experiment were you conducting?" Ye Chong was curious. What kind of experiment would sent them safely to Darkniss?

"We were doing an experiment on spatial windows. I discovered that we could use high energies to create spatial windows. My goal was to create faster and more convenient ways of travelling. The theories behind my experiment are..."

Aried turned lively once he began to talk about his experiments. Ye Chong did not stop him, but listened patiently instead and interrupted with the occasional question. This made Aried even happier.

"What caused the accident?" Ye Chong asked.

Aried shrugged. "I didn't know that Lady Rui Bing had a dimension keystone on her."

"Dimension keystones can affect spatial windows?" Ye Chong realized there was something to it. He recalled the circumstances in which he was sent from the base on Spectre to Dual Forest. There was also his first time entering Darkniss, when Xuan Ning told him that his dimension keystone had a strong effect on the entrance to Darkniss, which was also a spatial window.

Ye Chong decided then to let Aried continue with his research. Perhaps he could help them find their way home. He also decided to let Sha Ya assist him. After Sha Ya reached Level 9, she was able to detect very minute changes in spatial windows. This would be of tremendous help to the spatial scientist.

"Where did you get the teardrop mineralite?" Ye Chong took out the thumbnail sized mineral. It was very large compared to all the teardrop mineralites in his hands. Darkniss had no natural reserves of energy crystals. He was sure of that. In his effort to reduce their dependence on external supplies of energy crystals, he had allocated a lot of time and manpower into searching for energy crystals in Darkniss, but the results were disappointing. So far, he had found nothing.

It was simply incredible to see a teardrop mineralite here in Darkniss. The teardrop mineralite had attracted so many wild animals. Even the snowshade leopards and red-tailed beast had showed up. It was odd and surprising.

He recalled the time when he obtained his teardrop mineralite. There was the dark spatial window, and the eight-fingered red-tailed beast. Teardrop mineralite... Spatial window... Red-tailed beast... How were these three related?

Mei Wu answered him with reverence. "A few days ago, I was returning from one of my expeditions when I noticed numerous animal bodies along the way. I was curious, so I followed the trail

of bodies until I reached a lake. There, I saw two slitherlizards fighting each other for that thing. I thought that was strange, so I took it from them. I didn't think much of it since I did not recognize it. Later on, animals began to chase after me. I was lucky that this lady and her friends had come to my aid."

She could see that Rui Bing and Ye Chong were more than simple comrades in arms, so she treated Rui Bing with equal respect. The strongest commanded respect. This was an unspoken rule, and especially pronounced among shooters. High level shooters and low level shooters were different in status, and in other respects as well.

Mei Wu thought Ye Chong's physical prowess was beyond what she had ever imagined. She had saw how he killed a snowshade leopard, and then held out against three snowshade leopards for 20 minutes. She was shaken by the experience. Everything in the stronghold was challenging her imagination, and the creator of them all was this cold, young man in front of her.

12 hours later, the students who were trailing the red-tailed beast returned to the stronghold. Based on their report, there was a very narrow crack in the Sea of Threads. The red-tailed beast had disappeared into the crack. The students marked the location of the crack so that they could find their way back to it later.

Ye Chong went to inspect the crack himself. It was well hidden, and right smack in the middle of the Sea of Threads. Ye Chong did not enter it since he could not see what was inside. However, he had decided to bring a squad with him into the crack when the time was right. He suspected that the snowshade leopards and the Gold Dragons had come from the same place as well.

Rui Bing and the other two new arrivals were strong additions to Ye Chong's army. They had also produced a very subtle change in the stronghold. Ye Chong could only sense this change minutely, but he could not quite describe it. In the end, Ye Chong gave up trying to figure out this highly difficult and almost impossible

problem for him, and proceeded with his grand plan of development.

All of his students did not have dimension keystones for their mechs, but this was quickly solved since Aried was here. For an accomplished and knowledgeable spatial scientist, it was not a difficult problem to solve. Ye Chong passed all the information on spatial science in the three chips he got from Kui to Aried. The scientist appreciated it very much, and dived straight into them.

Sha Ya was ordered by Ye Chong to assist Aried. Despite having nothing to do for now, she remained composed and at ease. Compared to when she was Level 8, she now had an improved state of mind.

Work on the starship was still in progress. The construction was not interrupted because of the incident. Resources continued to pour in from Northern Lands, so Ye Chong did not have to worry about supplies.

Training for the few hundred shooters from the trade was going smoothly. Shooting exercises were easy peasy for them. There was less physical training, but more practice on using complicated weapons and group strategies.

Ye Chong did not plan to have them pilot mechs. Their jobs would be to man the warship.

Rui Bing followed Ye Chong around like his shadow. Wherever Ye Chong was, she would be there as well. She rarely spoke, and always looked serene. She looked charismatic in her white training garb. Everyone in the stronghold knew of her close relationship with Ye Chong.

Rui Bing was no longer wearing the white training garb that she had on when she first arrived in this new world. Jin Weidong had brought her presents when he visited the stronghold. When Rui Bing saw the new sets of clothing he had brought her, her calm expression brightened up. The other subordinates in the

stronghold were jealous and impressed by Jin Weidong's initiative.

Ye Chong ordered for Jin Weidong to bring a few more sets of training garb. Rui Bing's expression revealed nothing, but Jin Weidong could see that she was quietly overjoyed.

Sang Kan continued to work under Aried, but spent most of his free time with Duan Qian. Duan Qian was always beaten to a pulp by him, but the former was a resilient and strong character who refused to give up. Sang Kan was impressed by him, and offered guidance freely to the young man. Duan Qian improved by leaps and bounds.

Mei Wu obtained the Spider promised to her by Ye Chong, and saw the Shu sisters in the stronghold. However, she maintained her distance with her two former students, and left them after a few words of greeting. She was a Level 9 shooter, and she would not bow down to another master other than herself. However, she did think that it was good for her former students to find such a strong character as their master.

Shu Mo'er and Shu Man'er had changed a lot. They were now just like any other student. Despite having many admirers, they never reciprocated. Even Shu Man'er was no longer as cheerful as she once was. She responded coldly to any attention from her admirers.

The warship was still under construction. The massive operation would take a long time. It was fortunate that Darkniss was rich with metals, or the operation would have taken forever. Even so, it would be a long while before the ship was ready.

Besides the warship, the stronghold was also being reinforced for the second time. All the students were using the first batch of Harmony of the Winter Aria. These mechs were made of normal metal alloys due to the availability of materials back then.

Now that Ye Chong had discovered a few more mineral reserves, he had enough to spare despite building the warship to upgrade the

mechs with better metal alloys. Ye Chong even found some rare metals to upgrade Guardian's specs.

All these engineering works were proceeding in organized fashion. The weaponsmiths under Xi Yan's lead were no longer inexperienced newbies. After so many huge projects, they were improving fast.

Eastern Cloud and Western Frost were still in the thick of war, and that was good news for Ye Chong. Now, he no longer had to behave under Sun Sieha's watch. Ye Chong was not ambitious, but that did not mean he would bow down to power.

The students trained hard. Having seen the strong wild animals such as the red-tailed beast, they realized that they were still lacking in strength. In the pursuit of the red-tailed beast last time, a few students had nearly died under the arrowhead tail of the creature. They were no threat to the strong animal at all, and this made them frustrated.

From their combat experience, they begin to devise better group strategies in battle.

Troop leaders like Appilok had to conduct more simultaneous shooting practices, while the other students had to practice shooting like crazy.

As a result, the shooting scoreboard in the stronghold was refreshed much more frequently. The leading score went higher and higher. The students who trained harder than others in shooting would later become the infamous "sniper division" of the army. Circumstances forced all the students to improve as a whole very quickly.

They were slowly becoming stronger! Ye Chong could sense it.

Chapter 587: Imminent Departure

The warship was almost ready. Ye Chong was now bringing troops to the Sea of Threads. He had synthesized a special transparent gel that could hide all kinds of electromagnetic signals. Ye Chong used this transparent gel on their mechs and the warship. By applying a layer of this gel on the exterior, the mechs and the warship would be effectively invisible to the enemy. The only way to detect them would be by direct visual observation. Compared to full-skeleton mechs, the gel offered better stealth, since it was also effective against red-tailed beasts.

Thus, the demand for this colloid fungus in the stronghold skyrocketed overnight.

The wild animals around the Sea of Threads were not as strong as the likes of the red-tailed beast or the snowshade leopard, but they were still formidable. Hence, Ye Chong led the expedition himself. Harvesting work would have to be done manually since all signals would be impeded here. The remaining problem was about how to build a small harvesting base here.

Aside from harvesting, Ye Chong was also interested in the crack that ran along the entire Sea of Threads.

Construction of the harvesting base proceeded rapidly. This was all thanks to Sha Ya. Sha Ya found that the para-psychic wave nature of the place could stimulate shooters to improve quickly. Hence, Ye Chong ordered all the shooters to serve as workers in the Sea of Threads. Sha Ya was proven to be correct. Once their para-psychic abilities were inhibited, the shooters rapidly improved. They became excited of their work because of this. In the end, they arranged to sleep in the Sea of Threads, a place that even the red-tailed beasts were afraid of.

The mission to investigate the crack proceeded with great caution exercised.

The crack that ran along the Sea of Threads was very well hidden. It was blocked entirely by an ancient tree that was over thirty meters tall, and was only visible up close. The tree had a thick main stalk at ten meters in diameter, making it look short and strong. The purplish brown bark of the tree was as hard as metal. The leaves were also in a dark purple shade, with a strong metallic luster.

Compared to the thick girth of the tree, the crack was very narrow, barely five meters wide.

Only Ye Chong and Rui Bing went on this investigative expedition. Ye Chong thought that the students were already good in battle as a team, but their individual strengths were still lacking. If he and Rui Bing encountered any dangers that they could not fend off, they could always pull back much easily.

Rui Bing put on Guardian, which traced her bodily curves faithfully. She sat quietly on Celest's shoulder.

His archaic lance was not a suitable weapon in the narrow crack, so Ye Chong took out his parrying spear.

Celest carried Rui Bing and entered the crack with half lidded eyes.

Once they were inside, the view brightened. This was a naturally formed valley. They could see the marks left by tectonic shifts in the past.

It was very quiet in the crack. Not one sound was heard. Ye Chong and Rui Bing kept their guard up since they saw animal skeletons scattered along the bottom of the crack. Even skeletons of very powerful animals like the red-tailed beasts and snowshade leopards were common in here.

This made Ye Chong and Rui Bing felt even more wary. The skeletons told them how dangerous the place was.

"Be careful." Ye Chong warned softly. His eyes never left the

holographic screen.

Rui Bing acknowledged quietly and switched her posture. She put one hand on Celest's shoulder for support and bent her body forward slightly, so that she could be ready to attack when necessary. Her daggers were already in her hands.

Suddenly, a mist began to spread inside the crack. The white mist clouded their view instantly. However, it did not affect Celest's holographic scanning system.

Ye Chong looked at the stats from the photon processor. "This mist is poisonous."

Rui Bing nodded. "No wonder the animals died here."

Celest carried Rui Bing and advanced quickly. The terrain was complicated, with rocky protrusions here and there.

Aooh! They heard a quiet howl.

They were surprised by it, and carefully approached the source of the sound. It was a snowshade leopard. It had inhaled a lot of white mist. Its body had some odd blue tinge. The snowshade leopard stared sadly into the mist as it howled weakly. The unchallenged animal of Darkniss, the snowshade leopard, was now so weak that even a human child could kill it.

Ye Chong observed in a neutral tone, "The poison is strong."

Just as he finished, the snowshade leopard went motionless and stopped breathing.

They continued to see animal bodies along the way. Some of them were extremely tenacious. There were signs indicating that they had stayed in the crack for a long time before the poisonous mist invaded their bodies and caused them to become immobile. Nevertheless, the mist was not immediately fatal. It weakened the animal's body until it was left with only skin and bones, and finally died of starvation.

Rui Bing could not bear to see these animals suffer. Whenever she saw any animals that were still alive, she would end their suffering with her dagger. When the animals died, their eyes showed relief.

The crack was long. It took Ye Chong and Rui Bing five days to travel along it. Ye Chong soon found a pattern in the release of the poisonous mist. Only parts of the crack would be shrouded in the mist at one time. If you were fast enough and understood the pattern of the mist release, it would be possible to traverse the crack and survive.

So far, Ye Chong saw no signs of the six-fingered red-tailed beast. It had most likely survived its journey through the crack.

On the fifth day, they finally reached the exit out of the crack.

The exit brought them to the mountains.

Rui Bing stared at the mountains for a while. "We've been here before. The mountains extended far into the distance. This is close to where we first came to this world. If you go further along this direction, there is a flesh nest of the red-tailed beasts. However, we only ever saw low level red-tailed beasts there, not six-fingered ones."

Ye Chong made a mark on the map and eyed the seemingly endless mountain ranges. He said to Rui Bing, "Let's head back. We will come back here later."

They returned to the stronghold as fast as they could.

"Opening a spatial window required vast amounts of energy. Naturally occurring spatial windows usually draw energy from objects with high energy content, like the teardrop mineralite. I don't know whether the red-tailed beasts found those naturally occurring spatial windows or if they created their own, but they obviously know how to use teardrop mineralite to enlarge spatial windows. Naturally occurring spatial windows are not very big.

It's usually enough to fit just one mech. The spatial window that the red-tailed beasts traveled through is obviously a lot bigger."

Aried reported his findings to Ye Chong. Sha Ya was tremendously helpful to him. He could study the structure of spatial windows through her. Aried never imagined it possible for someone to sense the structure of spatial windows without the aid of any equipment. It was miraculous!

Even in the He Yue Galaxy, no equipment could do this!

Since Sha Ya did not have relevant background knowledge in spatial science, her descriptions were vague. Nevertheless, she was of great help to Aried.

"I am now studying how to enlarge spatial windows. As long as we have high energy materials like the teardrop mineralite, it should not be a problem. Of course, there must first be an existing spatial window to work on. That would be much easier than creating a spatial window from nothing." Aried explained frankly. Compared to common scientists, Aried's career path had been harder, exposing him to all sorts of human factors in the research process. Sometimes, Aried behaved more like a businessman. He would try to conduct his research in the direction favored by his investor. This would help him financially. He knew what Ye Chong needed and wanted right now, and had structured his research accordingly.

Ye Chong frowned. He needed to find the way back to return to the He Yue Galaxy, not enlarge spatial windows. He asked, 'How will that be useful?'

Aried said, "If you want to bring that starship back with you, it would be very useful."

"I see." Ye Chong nodded, commending him. He continued asking, "Do we have a way to find the path back to the He Yue Galaxy now?" This was a problem that exasperated him the most.

Aried shook his head. "That will depend on our luck. If we can find a spatial window that leads back to He Yue Galaxy, then all our problems will be solved."

"Where can we find a spatial window that leads to the He Yue Galaxy?" Ye Chong could not help but ask. Bio-photon processor technology here had improved somewhat, but they were still far from building an advanced bio-photon processor.

Aried hesitated, and then explained his hypothesis.

Ye Chong went into deep thought. After a long moment, he looked up and said, "Your theory makes sense, but we have searched the surroundings of the Sea of Threads. Aside from the spatial windows to Northern Lands and Western Frost, there are no other spatial windows. If your hypothesis is correct, it should have been just by the Sea of Threads."

Ye Chong had already searched his end of the Sea of Threads with his Hummingbirds. All the empty spots on their holographic map were complete. Ye Chong had discovered many ore reserves in the process, but did not mine them since the warship was near completion. He only extracted rare minerals from them. Ye Chong kept thinking about Mu and Shang's lost arm. He now had enough materials to restore it. Aside from extremely rare materials like the Do Kun stone and coraplatinum, he had sufficient amounts of other rare materials in his hands.

The students from the stronghold were now aware of the Sea of Threads, but they dared not enter the strange place yet. However, all the wild animals roaming near the Sea of Threads became target practice for them.

...

The massive object could fly. All the students in the stronghold looked flabbergasted. Aried would look at them with a face that said he thought the students were all ignorant barbarians.

When the warship first went airborne, it immediately dived sideways and crash landed. This was probably because the crew was feeling nervous. Fortunately, the hull was tough and safety measures were in place. No one was hurt. Eventually, the crew got familiar with flying the warship.

Ye Chong named the warship Darkniss. The lavish materials used for this ship were unrivaled. Just the materials used to build this warship could be sold at a sky-high figure.

There were 70 passageways built for the mechs inside to exit and engage. The ship cannons were powerful, but not the most advanced. Nevertheless, they were made of top quality raw materials, and thus were still very deadly. Besides these, Ye Chong also added a very important upgrade - shooting stations. These shooting stations were manned by professional shooters. They were more accurate than auto lock-on systems, and certainly much better than simple laser firing devices.

These shooting stations were difficult to maneuver, and were built especially for the shooters. Without atmospheric interference, shooters could extend their para-psychic senses further in outer space. These shooters were used to aiming at thumbnail sized targets. If it was something over ten meters tall like a mech or a red-tailed beast, their aiming would be flawless. To unleash the maximum potential of their aiming accuracy, the training program for shooters include studying a mech's structure and commonly vulnerable parts in wild animals. Shooters could not withstand the physical burden of piloting a mech in battle, but that problem was moot when they were shooting from a warship.

This amazing idea immediately improved a shooter's value in battle significantly, despite Ye Chong believing that shooters had limited capabilities before this. Every warship was vulnerable to close range enemies; for Darkniss, their firepower was strongest at close range.

"Looks like it's time to depart," Ye Chong muttered to himself.

Chapter 588: Return I

All the students and shooters returned obediently to their designed stronghold under Ye Chong's orders, where they awaited for further instructions. Even Jin Weidong was asked to return to the stronghold. Before this, he was asked by Ye Chong to purchase a large amount of supplies.

The warehouse was becoming the largest structure in their stronghold. It was fully stocked with supplies. Their next expedition was going to take a long time. They would most likely not return to their stronghold very soon. Ye Chong had used up all the food they had to make nutrition pills, so that they could bring more of them. Nutrition pills were not appetizing, but they were small and convenient to carry about. Besides, it provided all the energy and nutrients they needed.

As a precaution, Ye Chong made enough nutrition pills to last everyone in the warship for three years. Huge containers of nutrition pills were neatly arranged on the ship. The ship's cargo hold was also loaded with other supplies. No one knew what laid ahead of them. The better prepared they were, the more likely they would survive. Ye Chong was never one to complain about complicated preparation works.

He had also brought many top grade energy crystals to make sure they had enough power in Darkniss. Even the vastly influential Yan Family took a lot of effort to procure all the energy crystals they needed. Ye Chong paid an equivalent price for these energy crystals. However, the energy crystals still did not seem enough for him. The teardrop mineralite would be his backup power source for the warship Darkniss.

Nevertheless, he could not use up all the teardrop mineralite he had. If they really found a spatial window that led to the He Yue Galaxy, the teardrop mineralites were necessary to make the spatial window wider.

All the students had their orders. They knew that a long journey was ahead of them. These young people were very excited by the prospects. Many of them dreamed of adventuring in uncharted territories, but no one knew what their destination would be. The shooters were used to it, however. Every Level 6 shooter had their fair share of risky expeditions.

Jin Weidong and his comrades tried to glean some information from Ye Chong about the expedition, but they all failed.

In fact, they were only worried that Ye Chong would want to attack another country. Eastern Cloud was now at its peak in power; Northern Lands was prosperous; both countries were too powerful to make an enemy of. They knew exactly the kind of military strength Ye Chong had. Ye Chong had soldiers from all three countries, but Western Frost nationals were outnumbered by the other two.

They hoped that Ye Chong would not attack any of these countries. As long as Ye Chong did not attack their home countries, they would be more than willing to follow his lead. Hence, Jin Weidong and his comrades were worried that Ye Chong would choose Western Frost as his next target. After all, Ye Chong was now a man with great power, and no man in his position would be anything less than ambitious.

When all the preparations were done, Ye Chong ordered for them to depart.

They left three strongholds behind, leaving everything but some of the high precision equipment. Ye Chong never returned to these strongholds. These three abandoned strongholds were later on viewed as miracles. Shooters who ventured into Darkniss were all afraid of these three magnificent structures. Anything that tried to approach the stronghold would be killed. The overwhelming firepower was terrifying. No one knew that the strongholds were actually unoccupied. Ye Chong gave the extra supplies he had to Mei Wu. He had invited Mei Wu to join him for this expedition,

but Mei Wu had politely declined.

It was only 400 years later that Darkniss was accessible to common people. The mystery behind these three strongholds were gradually unraveled then. That was another story, however, that had nothing to do with Ye Chong now.

Ye Chong's order to abandon the strongholds surprised his students. They could not understand why their commander would abandon them, considering how sturdy those buildings were and all the things they left inside. Having lived in the strongholds for so long, some of the students missed the place.

The commander's orders were to be followed to the letter, however. Building another stronghold would not be a challenge anyway. That was how the students consoled themselves. Nevertheless, they soon grew used to life on their ship.

When Jin Weidong and his comrades saw their ship heading towards the Sea of Threads, they all felt relieved. Darkniss was now Ye Chong's territory. Since the students hunted outside everyday, the animal population in Darkniss had greatly reduced. Despite the threat of these humans, the animals did not dare to migrate further inwards beyond the Sea of Threads.

The warship Darkniss flew at a low altitude, a suffocating presence in the darkness of Darkniss. The animals on the ground could not fathom what this giant being was. They laid low and trembled in fear, hiding their heads inside the fungus threads.

The Sea of Threads seemed so wide and endless. The threads swayed gently, creating an illusion of ripples in the field of colloid fungi. Harvesting works on the Sea of Threads did not seem to affect it much.

"Switch to optical view." The wide and spectacular view of the Sea of Threads came onto the screen.

Inside the warship, people gasped in awe. They had never

ventured into the Sea of Threads before. Even the harvesting works were done only at the edges of the place.

Once they were inside the Sea of Threads, all connections they had with the strongholds were lost. The Sea of Threads blocked all forms of signals.

The Sea of Threads was dead quiet. There was nothing but the wide field of blue threads. As time passed, the crew became bored of this monotonous view.

Crew members in the bridge remained on duty, while the rest of the students resumed their normal routines. Warship Darkniss had all the facilities they needed. Crew members could train like they did before onboard the ship.

Of course, the ship was not fitted with any entertainment facilities, as was Ye Chong's wish.

Warship Darkniss maintained a high velocity course through the Sea of Threads. There were no obstacles in their flight path, and no wild animals to disrupt their journey.

The flight went on smoothly! It took only three days for them to clear the Sea of Threads. The colloid fungi did not interfere with the ship's flight capabilities, but they were a natural deterrent for wild animals. Since animals in Darkniss were sensitive creatures, they harboured a deep and primitive fear against the Sea of Threads, where their senses were significantly affected.

No animal had ever tried to breach the Sea of Threads. Even the six-fingered red-tailed beast had chosen the dangerous path in the crack to cross the Sea of Threads.

Once the students realized that they were out of the Sea of Threads, they felt most energetic. The students looked at the holographic screens in their rooms, curious of what was outside.

Before Matron Rui Bing and her companions arrived, no human had ever set foot into this place. Sha Ya had never heard of the

place. Even the most legendary shooter in history, Lascher, had never been here before. Sha Ya studied the unending mountain ranges on the holographic screen, carried away by its magnificence.

Ye Chong followed Sang Kan's directions and direct the ship towards where they first arrived in this world.

The 10-kilometer long warship flew less than three kilometers from the ground. Seen from down below, the structure was terrifying. As the ship dragged its shadow across the earth, the wild animals ran away as fast as they could. Even the snowshade leopard made its escape without delay. The students felt proud that the powerful animal was so intimidated.

The warship did not fly too quickly, since the area was unfamiliar to them. For everyone's safety, Ye Chong decided against a speedy course towards their destination.

"Sir, we found something." A crew member reported excitedly through the comm device in Ye Chong's ear.

Ye Chong felt invigorated. They had been flying for days without anything interesting to show for. He asked promptly, "What is it?"

"We scanned the area and found no metals or energy crystals in the vicinity." The students had learned to use the word "metal", which was actually just gravestone.

"No metals or energy crystals?" Ye Chong thought to himself in puzzlement. This new place was separated from the familiar Darkniss by the Sea of Threads, but these two places were in fact not too far apart. How could there be such a huge difference in the environment? This was a qualitative distinction, not a quantitative one.

As Ye Chong considered the matter, the crew member continued, "We also found traces of mining."

"Mining?" Ye Chong opened his eyes wide. The first thought that

came to him was - were there any other humans in this place?

"Link the feed here." Ye Chong ordered calmly.

Ye Chong studied the holographic screen intently. There were traces of digging on the ground, and some holes left behind. Ye Chong studied the marks and dismissed the possibility of human mining. He could not think of any human tools that would leave marks like these. The holes were uneven in width and depth. Some of them looked like they were left behind a long time ago.

Soon, a mech emerged from the warship Darkniss to collect earth samples from these holes. Analysis results soon confirmed that there was a much higher metal content in the earth compared to its surroundings. The holes must have been where metal ores were buried.

However, scanning results from their warship concluded that there were almost no metals in this place.

This might seem like a petty issue for some, since they no longer needed metals, but Ye Chong thought of a different and related problem. This was because he knew that animals like the snowshade leopards and red-tailed beasts were dependent on metals. Now that there were no metals here, they would have to find another place to survive.

Was this the reason for the invasion of the red-tailed beasts?

Ye Chong could not be sure, but he could tell that this was probably a huge contributing factor. Without metals and energy crystals, these animals could not live and prosper in this place.

If he was a red-tailed beast, he would definitely find a new place to call home.

However, Ye Chong could not understand how the red-tailed beasts could possibly manipulate spatial windows. It was an infinitely complicated skill. He went through his memories, and found that that might not be the case. He remembered the red-

tailed beasts entering He Yue Galaxy through spatial windows, but the creatures had never used spatial windows in battle.

He remembered also the eight-fingered red-tailed beast he saw in the underground cave and the spatial window in there. Ye Chong had obtained a sizable amount of teardrop mineralites that time, and met the red-tailed beast for the very first time. That spatial window must have been a naturally occurring one.

Perhaps Aried was right. Perhaps this new place had many naturally occurring spatial windows.

Ye Chong felt excited about the implications of his deductions. If they could really find a spatial window that led to the He Yue Galaxy, he would be able to return to Mu and Shang.

In the whole wide world, only Mu and Shang, Rui Bing and a few other people meant so much to Ye Chong.

Darkniss made its slow way forward. They encountered snowshade leopards and Gold Dragons, and even stronger animals. Curiously, they did not see any red-tailed beasts. Their territories must be entirely separate from these other creatures.

Sang Kan had an excellent sense of direction. He did not even lose his way in the Red Sea, much less in a place where he had traveled through before.

On the bridge, Ye Chong stood upright before the holographic screen. Rui Bing was in her white training garb, standing quietly beside him. The students all knew of Matron Rui Bing's quiet temperament, but they respected her regardless. On the one hand, she was their commander's wife. They all heard Sang Kan referred to Rui Bing as Madam, so it was only natural for them to assume this. Besides, Ye Chong never corrected their way of addressing her. This further convinced them that they were right about Rui Bing's status.

The Matron's strength was another reason she gained respect

from the students. Few knew exactly how powerful she was, but Sang Kan was easy to gauge. After all, he was always eager to train with the students. Even someone as strong as Sang Kan spoke of the Matron's abilities with great respect.

Whenever the Commander went on an important operation, he would only ever bring the Matron with him. This further increased the mystery surrounding Rui Bing.

"Sir, look!" A crew member cried out suddenly and pointed in front of them.

Chapter 589: Return II

The thin purple mist in front of them was very familiar to Ye Chong.

"It's the flesh nest of the red-tailed beasts. We came across it when we passed through here. There were only weak red-tailed beasts here, with one or two fingers only. Their flesh nest seemed to be having some kind of trouble. They are deteriorating rapidly." Rui Bing spoke up softly beside Ye Chong. This was where she and Sang Kan had first encountered the flesh nest.

"Prepare for battle." Ye Chong quietly gave the order. The crew members of the warship got to work immediately, like fast moving parts of a high precision machine performing their functions with definite accuracy. The combatants moved into position, while students in the first line of defense entered their mechs, standing by at their designated passageways.

Shooters and students in charge of the shooting stations were already in position. Powerful shooters like Sha Ya were tasked to monitor their surroundings with their parapsychic sense. The other shooters were all on standby for the imminent battle.

The warship Darkniss slowly but steadily entered the purple mist.

Within the purple mist, the holographic scanning system could not be used. They could only rely on the parapsychic sense of the shooters. Fortunately, Darkniss had Sha Ya, a Level 9 shooter of the highest caliber. Her parapsychic sense could reach further than any normal shooter could ever imagine. With her guidance, they need not worry about missing their shots.

Sha Ya closed her eyes. Her hair seemed to blow in the wind, despite the still air around her. Calm and seemingly endless parapsychic waves radiated outwards from her.

After five seconds, Sha Ya reported their first targets. "Five degrees from the radius vector, 11 kilometers ahead!"

A crew member close to her keyed in the numbers into the photon processor and marked it as a target. The information was then relayed to every combatant's photon processor. The entire process took only 1.5 seconds.

"Fire!"

Right after Appilok gave the order, numerous laser beams pierced through the purple mist.

Appilok was now a fully grown battle commander. Ye Chong put him in charge of their first line of offense, and he did not disappoint. Each mission was completed with flying colors. His victories convinced the other students to respect him as their leader, and this allowed him to lead the army more effectively.

A sharp and angry cry reverberated in the purple mist.

The thick laser beams from their warship's cannons were highly destructive, leaving a clear, straight path in the purple mist. In that moment, Ye Chong saw their target. It was the center of the flesh nest. Ye Chong did not know what was at the center of the flesh nest, but he remembered seeing his first six-fingered red-tailed beast at the center of a flesh nest.

The combined firepower from 67 ship cannons were enough to destroy a small planet of about 300 kilometers in diameter. Their attack on the flesh nest ensured total destruction.

Countless furious red-tailed beasts charged at their warship. Since the ship was covered with a layer of transparent substance derived from the colloid fungus, the creatures did not notice its arrival earlier.

Leading the creatures was a red-tailed beast. Its crimson red eyes glowed in anger. Its face twisted menacingly.

Ye Chong did not go out to meet the challenge this time, since he

knew it was not necessary.

As expected, the red-tailed beast immediately drew the attention of the shooters at their shooting stations. By then, the red-tailed beasts were only five kilometers away from Darkniss. At this distance, most of the shooters could already sense it.

One by one, their parapsychic waves radiated outwards.

They locked on to their target! This was the advantage of being a shooter.

The red-tailed beast noticed the parapsychic waves.

Red-tailed beasts were sensitive creatures. Ye Chong knew this from first hand experience. He saw evidence of it during his pursuit last time. The creature could detect metals hidden in rocks, far better than many of their specialized equipments.

The red-tailed beast seemed affected by its discovery. It looked scared, but Ye Chong could not know for sure. It was the animal whisperer, Sang Kan who studied the red-tailed beast and stroked his chin in thought, and then commented, "It's afraid!" The Sang Tribe understood wild animals, almost as well as they knew themselves.

How could this red-tailed beast not be afraid?

There were nine shooters above Level 7 who locked on to the red-tailed beast, and attacked it simultaneously. It was a terrifying experience, to be locked on by shooters above Level 7. After their training in the Sea of Threads, the shooters improved significantly in their parapsychic energies. A few of the Level 7 shooters were fast approaching Level 8. Their parapsychic energies were much stronger than before. The red-tailed beast's high sensitivity amplified the sense of being threatened by the parapsychic waves.

It was enough to frighten even a wild beast!

The six-fingered red-tailed beast turned to run. It stepped behind the other red-tailed beasts than ran past it, using them as cover.

Ye Chong looked at the escaping red-tailed beast without expression. He was not concerned about the habitat of the red-tailed beasts. In some ways, Ye Chong was a utilitarian. He would only make choices that benefited himself. These red-tailed beasts were a latent threat. They were weak now, but once they entered the He Yue Galaxy, they would surely be able to acquire enough metals and energy to evolve quickly.

It was a terrifying prospect. Hence, Ye Chong did not allow them mercy. Rui Bing supported him in this. The invasion of the red-tailed beasts had pushed humanity close to the brink of extinction. It was still unclear how many humans had died because of them. This was not a matter of good and evil, but of the conflicting relationship between two different species. Sang Kan did not really hate the red-tailed beasts. Few of the Sang Tribe died from the red-tailed beasts. The Yi Ju Zone was already cleared of red-tailed beasts. Newcomers from the Sang Village could only get to know these horrible creatures through records and conversations with their seniors.

Nine laser beams, each only as thick as an arm, shot out from their warship. The laser beams pierced through the horde of red-tailed beasts and converged into a single point.

The red-tailed beast stared in disbelief at the nine holes left in its body. Blood gushed out from its wounds. An anguished howl pierced through the purple mist!

Laser beams continued to rain down on the other red-tailed beasts. The animals cried out in pain. The purple mist was tinged with the color of blood. The army of red-tailed beasts in the air fell into disarray. One by one, the creatures fell from the sky.

Ye Chong's unique strategy using the shooters was paid off in full. All red-tailed beasts that came within range of their parapsychic waves never stood a chance. They were all shot down before they could even think of escaping.

As expected, the red-tailed beasts were mostly with one or two fingers. They were weak. This made Ye Chong more confident of his hypothesis. Perhaps there really was a spatial window that led to He Yue Galaxy around here.

There was no suspense in their battle anymore. The red-tailed beasts were thoroughly defeated by the powerful warship, Darkniss. The entire battle was firmly controlled by Ye Chong. The red-tailed beasts never posed a threat.

None of the mechs on Darkniss were deployed to achieve their victory. Only the shooters and the ship cannons were used. It was a result that even Ye Chong was satisfied with.

The battle was over very quickly. The purple mist in the area began to disperse. It disappeared quickly without warning, like it was following the footsteps of the red-tailed beasts.

Before the warship Darkniss was the dreadful aftermath of the battle. The bodies of red-tailed beasts were everywhere on the ground, their blood still seeping into the earth that they had lived on for centuries.

Besides the bodies, there were also many flesh columns. As Rui Bing informed him, these flesh columns were dying. They were dehydrating quickly. It was obvious that they were perishing.

Ye Chong was not particularly excited about their victory. The red-tailed beasts were relatively few, and only weak and immature ones at that. Who knew how many red-tailed beasts were still alive in the He Yue Galaxy? They had invaded planets and taken control over massive supplies of metals and pure energy. How many of them had evolved? Even Ye Chong could not stay calm thinking about it. Compared to the red-tailed beast he pursued last time, this one was much weaker.

They found no other lifeforms in this place aside from the red-tailed beasts. Compared to the lush and plentiful mountain areas, this place was like a wasteland.

The terrain was flat, suitable for using the Hummingbirds.

50 Hummingbirds were deployed in all directions to scout their surroundings. Live feeds were relayed directly to Darkniss. The warship was slowly heading towards where Rui Bing first arrived in this world.

"It's here." Sang Kan's sense of direction was reliable as ever. The crew members were no longer surprised by his skills, and this was a let down to Sang Kan.

The site did not look any different from their surroundings. It was simply more desolate than where the red-tailed beasts lived.

All the Hummingbirds were deployed, but they had found nothing of interest.

Darkniss did not linger around. It continued forward at constant speed. Ye Chong sent 13 squads out to widen their search range. The mechs fanned out in all directions from the warship.

It was on the 10th day when the environment began to look different. The flat terrain began to show mountains and even mountain ranges. However, these mountains looked different from the ones they passed by earlier. The land and the mountains were all barren. There were no signs of life everywhere around them.

Here, they discovered large numbers of dried skin. These were the skin shed by dehydrated flesh columns. This meant that the red-tailed beasts once lived here. They found a few more places with dried skin, but did not see any red-tailed beast or their skeletons.

Could it be that the red-tailed beasts that invaded He Yue Galaxy once lived here?

This seemed to be the most natural explanation. From their scouting efforts, it seemed that there were no other red-tailed beasts around other than the ones that they had killed.

Ye Chong learned nothing more about spatial windows during

this period, a problem that he was most concerned with. Aried was ready to explain why they found nothing at all. Naturally occurring spatial windows were periodic. They would often disappear for awhile due to external factors. However, if the surroundings of the spatial window were not disrupted, it would reappear after some time.

The terrain around them became more and more complicated. More precisely speaking, it became more and more fragmented. The mountain ranges gave way to numerous hills of rocks and pebbles. The rocks were easily disturbed, and would roll down with the slightest touch.

"Warning. Warning. Spatial instability straight ahead." The warning alarm blared abruptly, surprising everyone in the warship. Ye Chong and Aried, however, felt invigorated.

Spatial science was known to be deep and mysterious. What happened before them now further reinforced that image.

Everything around was dead silent. There was only the occasional sound of something cracking.

All the crew members saw something absolutely eerie. A rock of about five to six cubic meters suddenly began to fragment. Thin cracks spread across the rock like spiderwebs, slowly covering its entire surface. Nothing else around the rock was behaving weirdly.

Boom! There was a soft sound of explosion. The rock burst into countless tiny fragments, like broken glass.

All the crew members were horrified to see this. Inside the warship Darkniss was complete silence.

Aried had an odd expression on his face, a mixture of joy and fear. He muttered to himself, "Cracks in space ... There really are cracks in space ..."

Chapter 590: Return III

"No!" Aried jolted out of his trance and shouted. "Stop! Quick, stop the ship!" His face was drained of blood.

"Halt!" Ye Chong gave the order without delay. Darkniss slowly came to a stop. Ye Chong looked to Aried and asked, "What is it?"

Aried stuttered, "This is spatial crack... No... There are cracks in space... It's unstable..." He was not making much sense, perhaps because of feeling too nervous.

Ye Chong frowned. "Try again."

Aried inhaled deeply and gathered himself. "There are cracks in the space around here. These are small regions of chaotic spatial dimensions. These cracks in space move slowly, and anything in its way will be sliced into pieces. Our bodies cannot withstand spatial cracks. Besides, they are not visible to the naked eye. This place is dangerous. If our warship encounters a region with spatial cracks, everything in the warship, including us, will be cut into pieces." He pointed to the holographic screen. "Just like that rock!"

Everyone in the bridge looked horrified.

Aried paused for a moment, and then continued to explain quickly. "Spatial cracks are caused by instabilities in space. So far, there are no theories to explain their method of formation, but the cracks are threats to us, without a doubt. Spatial cracks can destroy anything in this world, no matter how strong it is. However, few spatial cracks were ever observed, located in only a few places with spatial instability. We have too little research on them. I don't know much about them myself."

Ye Chong looked calm. His composure soothed the panic in his crew members, for they trusted their commander. They believed that he would think up a way to counter this threat.

"What do you suggest?" Ye Chong asked Aried. He was the expert

in this matter. Surely he must have a plan.

"We have no sensors to detect spatial cracks on this ship, so we can only build one from scratch. Quick! I need a good engineer." Aried did not hesitate to ask for what he needed. This was not the time to be polite. If they were to find themselves in the path of a spatial crack, they would be finished.

"Alright! I'll help you." Ye Chong did not hesitate to lend a hand either. He was the best man for the job on the ship.

Just as the two men began to leave, Sha Ya broke her silence. "Perhaps I can help."

Everyone looked at her. She still wore her typical calm expression, but her voice no longer sounded so hoarse. "I can sense them."

Aried stopped to absorb her words, and then blurted out with joy, "Right right right, how could I have forgotten about you? You can sense the structure of spatial windows. These spatial cracks will not be a problem for you."

Zeep! Suddenly, one of the holographic screens went dark. Someone reported, "Hummingbird 311 was attacked and destroyed." From the other holographic screens, they could see clearly how the Hummingbird was destroyed. It was on its way back to the ship when the entire bird structure suddenly collapsed into pieces. It was chilling to watch!

Everyone watched the Hummingbird silently broke into pieces in midair. It all happened in less than a second, without any warning. Nothing came into contact with the Hummingbird when it happened. The machine simply burst into pieces just like that, without any clear indication of why or how it happened. It was still uncertainty that left a strong impression in the crew.

"30 degrees off the radius vector!" Sha Ya suddenly raised her voice.

The bridge burst into activity after the initial silence. Crew members quickly directed the warship towards the right.

Ye Chong shook his head inside. These students needed more experience and training. His expression betrayed none of his thoughts. He knew that, as their leader, he must maintain a calm image so that his soldiers could stay calm as well.

As expected, the students quickly recovered from the initial shock and panic. They listened carefully to Sha Ya's instructions and directed their ship accordingly. Darkniss advanced as slow as possible.

The bridge was silent except for Sha Ya's directions. Aside from the few crew members in charge of flying the warship, the other crew members held their breaths and stared at the holographic screens.

Sha Ya knew the terminologies. She had gone through the same training as these students. Moreover, she had good spatial awareness. Darkniss flew without any issue.

Nevertheless, everyone on the ship did not relax. In fact, they were tensed. They had seen rocks of different sizes crumbling on the screens. Of all the Hummingbirds they deployed, only three made it back. The others were all metal scraps now.

Ye Chong took a glance at Sha Ya, focused on her parapsychic feedback, and then turned to Aried. "Will there be danger ahead of us?"

Aried smiled bitterly. "I don't know. Spatial cracks are rarely discovered, and they are too dangerous. Any experiments done on them were by powerful and resourceful research organizations. Someone like me never stood a chance. I've never heard of any significant results from their research so far. We know simply too little about them."

Ye Chong went quiet. He considered for a moment, and then

asked, "Is it possible to have spatial windows around here?"

Aried nodded. "Where there are spatial cracks, it is very likely to have spatial windows too. As long as there is enough energy to stimulate it ..."

Aried and Ye Chong exchanged a look.

Aried suddenly got excited. "Spatial windows, right, it's spatial windows! There must be spatial windows that lead elsewhere in this place! Perhaps the red-tailed beasts entered the He Yue Galaxy through here. Right! It's very likely the case!"

The possibility for returning to the He Yue Galaxy was real. Standing beside Ye Chong, Rui Bing's eyes gleamed with hope.

"We need to survive this first." Ye Chong's calm voice shook Aried out of his excitement. Aried considered their situation for a while, and then raised his head. "We can only rely on Sha Ya for now. Regions with spatial cracks are usually not very big. They are actually regions with spatial instability. Once the region reached a certain size, space will collapsed back into itself. Based on the current speed, however, it will take a few days."

Everyone looked towards Sha Ya, who had shut her eyes and looked very peaceful.

The warship had flown for two days. Aside from the one time when it brushed past a spatial crack on its side, the journey was uneventful. The close call left a half-meter deep gash in the thick hull armor. There were crack marks inside the gash. Everyone felt chilled when it happened, but the hull was soon repaired.

Ye Chong had never flown a ship so slowly, but he had no choice. Some things were best left to the professionals. This was something Ye Chong learned a long time ago.

"Sir, there's something you should see." A crew member's tense voice broke the silence in the bridge.

Ye Chong looked up.

On the holographic screen was a black spatial window, suspended in the air.

"A spatial window!" Aried sounded jubilant. He was also repeating himself a lot. "It's really a spatial window, oh, my god ..."

The spatial window was about 15 meters in diameter. The black circle floated quietly in the air, as soundless as their surroundings.

"What's that?" Rui Bing spoke up, pointing somewhere close to the spatial window.

Ye Chong followed her finger and looked. His eyes widened. He reached out with his right hand and shouted, "Halt!"

The crew members quickly stopped the warship. Ye Chong looked up towards the holographic screen and fixed his eyes on it.

"Zoom in there."

The holographic screen zoomed in on the lower left corner, providing finer details.

It was a human shaped figure, like a human clay statue. That statue was large. It was in a half sitting position, but it was probably as tall as a mech when standing up.

This was the only thing Ye Chong and his people had seen in this place that bore similarities to humans. Was this something natural or manmade? If it was manmade, then who made it? Why make this clay statue at all?

Things made an eerie turn with the sudden appearance of a clay statue and a spatial window. The sitting clay statue was a mystery.

"Sha Ya, are there any dangers around the spatial window?" Ye Chong turned towards her and asked.

"It's very dangerous!" Sha Ya replied solemnly. "There are many spatial cracks around the spatial window, and they are moving faster than the ones we have seen before."

"How do we get closer to the spatial window?" Ye Chong looked

at Sha Ya.

Sha Ya held his gaze for a moment before closing her eyes again.

After about 30 seconds, she reopened her eyes and stated plainly, "There is a path. It's not wide. We can only travel on foot."

"Alright, let's go." Ye Chong did not hesitate.

Sha Ya led the group. Rui Bing followed closely behind Ye Chong. They first landed via a small transport ship. However, even this itself was laborious. What should have taken only one minute took them 15 minutes instead. There were no obvious signs of danger around them, but they were in fact surrounded by spatial cracks. The three of them proceeded with great caution.

After they landed, Sha Ya led them both on their slowly journey forward. She closed her eyes and kept her parapsychic sense focused on their immediate surroundings. She walked quickly without opening her eyes. Ye Chong and Rui Bing followed her closely. They veered left and right, and sometimes stepped backwards. Sha Ya's physical training was effective. She could not run as fast as Ye Chong or Rui Bing, but she had improved significantly.

It took them only 30 minutes to reach the clay statue.

Sha Ya could not understand why Ye Chong was so interested in the clay statue that he would risk approaching it. This was not uncharacteristic of him. Rui Bing said nothing as she quietly watched after Ye Chong.

Ye Chong walked to the front of the clay statue. He could see it much clearer from here. This was man made, he was certain of it.

The earth on the surface of the statue looked loose. Ye Chong nudged it a little, and a huge chunk fell off.

Underneath the earth was something black in color. Ye Chong's eyes widened. His pulse spiked up. Quickly, he began to dust off the earth covering the statue.

There was a lot of earth, about 50 centimeters thick. They were mostly fine soil or dust. How many years would it have taken for so much dust to gather?

Rui Bing and Sha Ya saw him moving, and promptly went to help him.

Five minutes later, they cleared away all the dust and soil. The three of them were covered with dust, but they did not seem to notice. Their attention was entirely on the huge object in front of them.

It was a black colored mech. Despite its age, many of its parts still looked brand new. Ye Chong quickly noticed that it was heavily damaged. It must have gone through a very intense battle.

There was a big hole in the pilot cabin. Something sharp must have pierced through it. This attack was fatal. The mech pilot would have never survived it. This was also the biggest damage dealt on the mech.

The mech had a dark metallic luster. Ye Chong was familiar with this metallic feel and texture. The mech had a distinctive logo of a long leaf on its surface. Ye Chong had never seen this mech before, but he was certain of one thing.

Ye Family's mech. This was a classic, advanced level mech of the Ye Family!

Chapter 591: Return IV

The mech was well preserved. Aside from the damages it received, the other parts did not look like they had aged much. Of the Three Aristocratic Families, Ye Chong was most familiar with mechs from the Ye Family. He had piloted many of the Ye Family's mechs. With the exception of Ye Yin's mech, he had used even a Mandate class mech, Moon King. Most of the Ye Family's disciples could not hope to compare with him.

This mech, however, did not look like a familiar model. Ye Chong could, of course, ascertain that it was no ordinary mech. From the thick layer of dust and soil covering it, he knew that the mech had been here for a very long time. Thus, this mech must be a very old model of the Ye Family. It was only natural that he had not seen it before.

The pilot cabin was heavily damaged, so it was easy to open the hatch and enter. Of course, only someone crazily strong like Ye Chong could lift the damaged pilot cabin hatch up easily with his bare hands.

Ye Chong and Rui Bing entered the pilot cabin while Sha Ya waited outside. It was a tight fit for both Ye Chong and Rui Bing inside the pilot cabin.

The controls inside the mech's pilot cabin were arranged very differently compared to modern day mechs. This was further proof of the mech's age. On the pilot seat was a pile of skeletons, probably the pilot's. Ye Chong and Rui Bing carefully avoided the skeletons, but Ye Chong could not help but notice that there were many broken bones in the pile. The mech pilot must have suffered grave injuries before death.

Ye Chong's attention finally went to the control console, which was completely intact. Usually, the control console would have a memory chip that automatically recorded all information on the

mech, including holographic recording. By inspecting the contents of this chip, one could know all about the mech.

Mechs from the Three Aristocratic Families were guarded with proprietary technology. Only a person of the Ye Family's bloodline could access a mech of the Ye Family. Ye Chong had seen how it worked with Moon King. He did not know why he had Ye Family blood, but Ye Luo's test suggested that he did.

The second time was easier. Ye Chong took out his dagger and made a small cut on his finger. He pressed a drop of blood onto the control console. Rui Bing watched Ye Chong quietly, feeling sorry for him.

"Identity authentication is successful. Access granted." A bionic voice suddenly spoke up, surprising them both.

Ye Chong was not surprised by the fact that he was granted access, but he was surprised by the mech's energy cell capacity. After so many years, the mech still had power! Since when was energy cell technology so advanced? He found it odd, but kept his curiosity contained while he began to look through contents of the mech's memory chip.

Zip! Suddenly, the holographic screen lit up.

"Shang, prepare for battle!" The first words that came from the video on the holographic screen caught Ye Chong completely off guard. Shang. He did know if this "Shang" was the same one as his friend. "Perhaps they share the same name," Ye Chong thought to himself. The man who said those words sounded cautious.

Ye Chong continued watching the video.

"Wah, what's that monster, it's so ugly!"

That comment hit Ye Chong like a lightning bolt. His body froze as he stared at the holographic screen.

Shang! That was definitely Shang's voice! Ye Chong could not believe his ears. How was Shang related to this mech? He thought

of Mu and Shang's mysterious past and how he lost his memories. All of that remained a mystery so far. Shang had said that Mu's consciousness had emerged after his. Before Mu was born, Shang was the only consciousness in his body.

Could it be ... This was his chance to know about Shang's origins. Ye Chong's heart raced.

"Haha!" The man laughed easily. "Shang, as usual, I'm the striker, you're the defense! I'm doing all the heavy lifting here, so you better to look after my wife and son, Shang!"

"Stop blabbering! Lil' Luo Luo, can't you just get to it already?" Shang sounded lazy and insolent.

"Wife, watch how your husband kill this monster! Son, don't you dare pee in your mother's lap." The man sounded proud of himself.

A woman hidden from view laughed softly.

Suddenly, a creature appeared on the holographic screen. A red-tailed beast! Ye Chong's gaze focused on the animal. He hit the pause button to freeze the video.

One, two, three ... Ye Chong counted to himself ... There were eight fingers! Ye Chong's heart skipped a beat. Eight fingers. He had only seen one eight-fingered red-tailed beast, and that was the most powerful one he had ever encountered. Could this red-tailed beast be the same one that he saw?

Ye Chong could not be sure.

As the video continued, the image began to shake violently. The red-tailed beast was constantly shifting around the mech, coming in closer and then moving away again. Ye Chong believed that this was probably some battle strategy of the mech pilot.

After a while, Ye Chong was able to gauge the mech pilot's abilities. He was very strong! Not considering the mech's capabilities, Ye Chong thought that this man was at least on the same level as Ye Family's ace, Ye Yin. No, this mech pilot was

probably stronger than even him. He was obviously more experienced than Ye Yin.

Even Ye Chong himself only had a 50-50 chance of defeating this mech pilot. However, since Ye Chong had Celest, he was sure he would be able to best this mech pilot. Celest had much better specs than this old mech. Besides, after its upgrade, Celest had become much stronger than before. If they used the same mech, Ye Chong believed that he would be on about the same level as this mech pilot.

Ye Chong saw the date indicated on the video, and found that it was recorded 26 years ago! To have this level of ability 26 years ago was amazing! 26 years was a long time for a mech pilot who could learn fast, enough to have several breakthroughs at least.

The mech pilot was strong! Ye Chong felt deep respect for him, as he would for anyone who proved to be strong.

"The Three Aristocratic Families are no longer what they used to be," Ye Chong thought to himself as he continued to watch the 26-year-old recording.

However, what did it matter to him? He did not care about the Three Aristocratic Families. Ye Chong did not know where that thought came from. Even though he was of the Ye Family bloodline, he never felt anything special for the Ye Family.

Lil' Luo Luo ... Ye Chong suddenly recalled the legendary Ye Family's ace 20 years ago - Ye Luo. Could this man be Ye Luo? Ye Chong thought it highly likely. Perhaps only the Ye Family's ace could reach this level. Ye Chong never expected himself to one day think of this so-called Ye Family's ace, someone he was inspired by and thought highly of, to be just another opponent of equal strength.

Only the strong would have this level of confidence in their own abilities. Such was Ye Chong's situation.

Ye Chong continued to watch the holographic recording.

The battle was intense. This red-tailed beast was very strong. Ye Chong thought many times that the mech pilot could hurt it, but the creature easily avoided these attacks. Ye Chong imagined the battle himself. If he was in the mech pilot's position, fighting against this eight-fingered red-tailed beast, could he win?

Ye Chong studied the holographic screen closely, not noticing the sweat that was already forming on his forehead. Rui Bing looked at Ye Chong worriedly, but bit down on her lip and forced herself to keep quiet.

More and more sweat formed on Ye Chong's forehead, which then rolled down his neck.

Suddenly, Ye Chong's breathing turned shorter. His eyes gleamed meaningfully. Ye Chong's body jolted as he broke out of his trance. Ye Chong panted heavily, but his eyes showed that he was now calm and collected as usual.

Rui Bing heaved a sigh of relief.

"This red-tailed beast is powerful," Ye Chong plainly. He looked back at the holographic screen. The red-tailed beast had a firm upper hand. If it was not a red-tailed beast, Ye Chong would have thought it had parapsychic abilities. The animal fought like Xi Feng Tribe's mentalists, with the ability to predict its enemy's next move. Compared to the mentalists, however, it was far stronger.

Even Xi Feng Tribe's Huang Jiming, their so-called ace, would have a hard time dealing with this creature's attacks, much less normal mentalists.

The battle soon turned critical.

Shang's lazy demeanor was replaced with great solemnity. He provided support fire from behind Ye Luo. With his assistance, the battle came to a stalemate.

The animal was able to evade even Shang's gunfire. Ye Chong's

expression was somber. Shang was inferior to Mu when it came to combat, but the difference was very slight. Ye Chong had never seen any mech pilot able to best the mech.

However, this battle recording showed that the combined effort of Ye Chong and Shang was only just enough to hold the eight-fingered red-tailed beast at bay.

It was a terrifying though! A chill went up Ye Chong's spine.

Chapter 592: Return V

Judging by the current state of the battle, it was almost certain that the battle would end in a stalemate. The red-tailed beast was stronger, but Shang and Ye Luo working together put them on equal ground. The only thing that Ye Chong could not understand was why Shang remained stationary throughout the battle.

Shang was a lazy fellow, but he always treated battle seriously. Besides, this was a critical situation. Why would the mech choose to fire his weapon while remaining at the same position? Shooting from a stationary position was easier than shooting and moving at the same time, but the latter was more effective and powerful in actual combat. Moreover, Ye Chong knew that Mu was a particularly competent shooter.

Why, then, did Shang choose to shoot from a stationary position?

Ye Chong suddenly remembered that Ye Luo mentioned his wife and child earlier. Were they sitting inside Shang? That would explain why Shang did not move about. A child could not withstand the pressure from these motions. The holographic recording had limited information. Ye Chong had to make guesses based on what was available to him.

The battle soon turned to a stalemate. Ye Luo and Shang worked together seamlessly like they had done it hundreds of times. The red-tailed beast tried to escape the Ye Family mech's control but to no avail. Shang's long range suppression fire also restricted the animal's movements.

Even so, victory for Ye Luo and Shang would be very difficult. They did not know how to achieve that for the moment. Ye Luo could keep the red-tailed beast at bay, but not injure it.

"Luo, there's someone on the trash planet! I'll ask him to look after the baby, then we'll take care of this monster together." A woman spoke with determination through the comms.

"Trash planet" - Ye Chong frowned at the word. He noticed a planet in the background for the first time, and then his heart raced. It looked very familiar!

Wasn't this the trash planet that he had lived on for more than a decade? Could it be ...

Ye Chong felt his mouth turned dry.

"Alright, is 20 minutes enough?" Ye Luo replied swiftly. The longer the battle dragged on, the worse it would be for them. Once the animal identified the pattern in their attack coordination, they would quickly lose control of the battle. Shang could not execute any evasive maneuvers with the baby inside. It was simply too dangerous.

"Stay safe." The woman sounded deeply concerned, but did not delay her departure. She went straight for the nearby planet.

Ye Luo laughed and replied smoothly, "Don't worry, wife, if we can't beat it straight, we'll outsmart it!"

Once Shang left, the pressure on Ye Luo escalated. It was obvious from the recording that he was in a dire situation. The red-tailed beast was agile and fast, much faster than a human could react to it. Ye Luo had never seen anything like it. He was momentarily at a loss.

Nevertheless, despite the dangerous situation he was in, Ye Luo was still the ace of the Ye Family. Every time the red-tailed beast's arrowhead tail went for him, he could avoid by a hair's breadth.

The tail of a eight-fingered red-tailed beast was much stronger than one with six fingers. The arrowhead tail was black in color, and moved like it had a life of its own. It was faster and stronger than its weaker counterpart. Ye Chong watched with a sinking heart. He knew that if he were to encounter this eight-fingered animal, he would probably not make it out alive.

The red-tailed beast seemed to be able to predict its opponent's

movements. This was just like a mentalist. This made the animal even more dangerous, and Ye Luo suffered because of it. The eight-fingered red-tailed beast was much stronger and faster than a Jie expert. Its arrowhead tail was also a formidable weapon. From the looks of it, the animal also had parapsychic-like abilities. This made the animal an even more dangerous enemy.

The battle progressed with Ye Luo being overwhelmed by his opponent. The red-tailed beast managed to brush past Ye Luo a few times, but Ye Luo was also fast enough to survive them with only scratches to show for.

Suddenly, the red-tailed beast seemed to realize something, and began to attack with even more vigor.

This was the turning point of the battle.

Ye Luo's situation became even more dangerous. He received multiple injuries in just a short while. This was only five minutes after Shang left.

The battle turned vicious. Ye Chong heard Ye Luo yelling furiously now and then. One of the best mech pilots alive was forced to retaliate with all he got. The red-tailed beast began to sustain injuries as well, and this made it more cautious. The animal began to move more slowly.

This gave Ye Luo a chance to catch his breath. Ye Chong could hear him panting heavily in the recording. However, it was still 10 minutes until Shang returned!

These 10 minutes were like hell on earth.

The red-tailed beast did not give Ye Luo long to rest. It charged again. The battle continued as before, with Ye Luo at a heavy disadvantage.

The red-tailed beast's figure suddenly appeared on the holographic screen. Just as it was about to brush past Ye Luo, it suddenly turned around and struck out with its tail towards Ye

Luo.

Crack! The arrowhead tail destroyed one of the auxiliary engines.

Just like a dam with a piece of its wall chipped off, this led to a chain reaction. Ye Luo reacted quickly, but it did not stop him from descending further into a tight corner.

Ye Chong shook his head. Even he could not turn the tides of the battle were he in the mech pilot's position. The man was in great danger. His death was imminent.

"Luo!" His wife cried out through the comms. Ye Luo had almost lost control of the fight, and his life.

A laser beam went straight for the red-tailed beast, hoping to force it away. The red-tailed beast was cunning, however. It knew that this was its final chance. If the two humans were allowed to join forces again, it would not survive the battle.

The animal braced itself for the laser beam attack and went for Ye Luo.

The arrowhead tail penetrated Ye Luo's pilot cabin! The recording shook violently. Scraps of metals were flying everywhere. The red-tailed beast's tail went through the left side of Ye Luo's abdomen. Ye Luo was stuck to the animal's tail. Blood sprayed everywhere!

"No!" The woman screamed with grief. Countless laser beams were fired.

Ye Chong saw Shang's full form for the first time, with a blue-white energy gun in its hand. Shang's image quickly vanished as the holographic recording switched back to the pilot cabin's interior.

Ye Luo groaned, but his hands were still typing fast on the control console.

The red-tailed beast was about to pull out its arrowhead tail

when the mech brought its two arms in and caught the animal's tail tightly in its grasp.

The red-tailed beast froze. All the laser beams fired by Shang landed on the animal's body. Like rocks thrown against a marsh, the back of the red-tailed beast was littered with holes.

The red-tailed beast looked like it was in pain. Ye Luo did not wait for it to recover from the shock. The mechanical arms pulled the mech towards the animal. The two of them were close to each other now. The red-tailed beast did not expect its enemy to be able to retaliate still.

The mech's knee crashed heavily into the red-tailed beast's abdomen. Ye Family's mechs were designed like porcupines. A mechanical joint like the knee would always be fitted with barbs.

Inside the pilot cabin, Ye Luo could not endure much longer. He vomited blood all over the pilot cabin. His last counterattack was done with his final breath.

Wham! The red-tailed beast's face twisted. It wriggled like it was mad. The mech could no longer hold on to the red-tailed beast and was flung away.

Ye Chong saw two large bloody holes in the abdomen of the red-tailed beast.

"No!" The voice was devoid of hope. There was the sound of blood dripping.

Rui Bing's eyes reddened. She inched closer towards Ye Chong by instinct, and Ye Chong felt his chest tightened.

On the holographic screen, the red-tailed beast charged towards Shang like a mad animal. The two figures grew smaller and smaller on the holographic screen. Ye Chong noticed that Ye Luo's mech was flung towards a spatial window. This was probably where the red-tailed beast came from.

By now, Ye Luo had stopped breathing. His final attack had

drained all life from his body.

The recording turned dark, and then flashed. There was a loud crashing sound, and the recording shook. Ye Chong knew that this was when the mech crashed into the ground.

Things quieted down soon. What Ye Chong saw on the holographic screen now was comparable to what he could currently see outside the mech. The mech must have landed where it was today.

The recording became silent. Nothing changed.

Ye Chong pressed fast forward until three days later. The multiply injured red-tailed beast emerged from the spatial window. It looked even more pitiful than before. Basically, the animal was shot full of holes. One of its arms was barely connected to the body.

This was probably how Shang lost his arm. Ye Chong realized that the woman must be dead. When he found Shang, the mech's dimension keystone indicated that it had no master. Only when a mech pilot died would a mech automatically refresh its dimension keystone to a blank slate.

However, it seemed that the red-tailed beast was also gravely injured. It looked bloody all over.

The red-tailed beast turned to Ye Luo's mech with a hungry look on its face. However, it quickly shifted its attention to the mech's surroundings and hesitated.

"The mech's surroundings? But there's nothing there on the holographic screen!" Ye Chong thought to himself in bafflement.

Chapter 593: Antecedent

"Could it be the dimensional crack you told me before?" Rui Bing recalled with tears welling up her eyes after seeing the visual just now. She might have experienced parting with loved ones but she was still a rather simple person who only fought with her fists and kicks for justice and love. Her voice was muzzled by her nasal as she spoke.

"Mhmm, maybe," Ye Chong nodded in agreement.

In the visual projected, the harshly wounded red-tailed beast had a moment of hesitation before it left the place for good, and the motion looked still for the next few minutes. If it was not the dust particles rolling on the ground, Ye Chong would have assumed the visual had ended. It was clear that this mech was installed with a powerful detection system, or a powerful energy system, more precisely speaking.

The visual was fast-forwarded at drastic speed and Ye Chong could see the constant harassment by other red-tailed beasts 26 years after that. The detection had never stopped working for the past 26 years and certainly had justified its outrageously long-lasting energy reserve.

Towards the later part of the visual, Ye Chong finally understood why that red-tailed beast left the scene at first, as well as how the mech lasted till now - perhaps, the prey was not meant to be consumed after all. As Ye Chong continued observing, he saw a small pack of red-tailed beasts being shredded into countless pieces upon approaching it. The densely formed crack of dimension seemed to have distorted them into a swirl of flesh.

The mech was apparently a fly-trap for the red-tailed beasts, captivating and deadly.

The red-tailed beast that decided to leave the mech alone had 8 toes, while these seemingly blind red-tailed beasts had 5. From

this, Ye Chong could speculate that red-tailed beasts with more than 5 toes could sense the dimensional phenomena, though it was a wild guess.

As time passed by, Ye Chong witnessed the massive migration of the red-tailed beasts while the timestamp matched the period where red-tailed beats were first seen, at an abrupt occasion, in He Yue galaxy.

This place was obviously a real place of death with these spatial distortions around. Ye Chong gave up counting the deformed carcasses piling up by the mech as he shifted his attention to the number of packs of migrating red-tailed beasts. There were 57 packs of them that attempted a migration in the last 26 years and only 12 of them actually made it.

The strange thing was... only a handful of them were spotted at He Yue galaxy, so where were the rest? No one knew, but clearly a majority of their compatriots had been slaughtered mercilessly by the dimensional cracks.

There were a few of them scouting the escape path and mostly they were sacrificed. Ye Chong's speculation could be true, judging how the scouts all had more than 5 toes and they also happened to be the leader of their respective packs. Their leadership made them take up the most dangerous task ever while their innate ability only gave them a partial chance of survival, as they still needed luck in order to survive.

Ye Chong was not able to perceive their full departure however. The record seemed to have not captured the exact manner the red-tailed beasts "transported" themselves via the spatial window.

Nevertheless, this mech contained precious information, a large amount of them.

And one of them mentioned Shang.

Shang had always been a total mystery to everyone and this time

Ye Chong had something like a biography about this tactical ally of his, which included a clear, complete visual of him in his prime.

There were bits of information about Ye Luo and the pilot of Shang, but those failed to grab Ye Chong's attention. His sole interest was always on either the friend or the foes, Shang or the red-tailed beasts in this context. Ye Chong believed he hardly associated with Ye Luo and the family.

While still being remained in the shock after witnessing the destruction caused by the dimensional cracks, Ye Chong began reading the journal entries stored in the processor. There was nothing particularly futuristic about storing a journal for mech pilots. No fancy hologram projection, no audio record, it was just an ordinary page of words written by the pilot as believed to be about rather significant events. It was more manageable, perhaps, for space exploration pilots to keep their journals in text form since it had a smaller file size. It also seemed like the "black box" for the mech since the journal was stored at the most well-protected component of the processor.

Ye Chong evaluated each entry carefully. The journal was concisely written yet every single sentence was terrifying to both Ye Chong and Rui Bing.

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

It was my 17th birthday today. I was gifted 'Lazunite'."

Lazunite was probably the name of this mech, which was a combination of lazunite and nightfall.

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Lazunite was a great ally. It's been 3 months since obtained. Lost only in the 39th round in clan war. The other clan members was defeated by Lazunite in less than 10 moves."

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Free space zone, encountered strong enemies of 20, defeated 19

and had a draw. Departed home, during which Xue Lai clan scouting team encountered, all destroyed."

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Another encounter with the Xue Lai team. 110 casualties this time, smashed 42, wounded 17 and the rest escaped."

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

The third time encountering Xue Lai, with 178 units. Utilized the geographical benefits, smashed about half of the group, escaped the scene safely."

...

The following entries seemed much later...

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Age: Over 30. Skills: honed apparently. A master of oneself, ranked the top. Improvements were significant. No one in the clan could defeat me. Overjoyed."

...

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

A man with broken heart, without the will to fight. The greatest depression comes from the heart. Sigh."

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Encountered a large group of Xue Lai, presumably coming to challenge for fun. Cleared 2/3 of the entire army. We might be the greatest nemesis to each other, not even the other aristocrats could compete."

That was when Ye Chong clicked the next entry and saw something.

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Xue Lai had a backup this time. A formidable foe. Possibly their top mech model Shang."

That was it.

That was really it. Ye Chong enlarged his eyes, as finally confirming Shang's identity, being a mech of the Xue Lai clan, the top-notch model too, 2 decades back. That explained his capabilities even today, handicapped. Ye Chong could not help but to marvel Shang at his prime.

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Shang challenged. Pilot: Unknown. Fought 10 days straight, outcome: negative."

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

20th day. Outcome: negative."

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

A few fights had been done with Shang coming back. Outcome: negative."

"Outcome: Negative."

"No outcome after the battle."

...

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Shang had won over my respect. Intend to ally. Lack of a method however."

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

A gentle touch, a fateful encounter truly. The top pilot of Xue Lai clan was a woman! Her name was Yu Yu. Heart: pumping fast. Body temperature: rising."

...

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Formed a party. No regrets in life, not anymore!"

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Utilized pathway of Xue Lai and entered 5 major galaxies. Rappports grew, travelling in relaxation. Hope the journey never ends!"

...

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Officially engaged. Today was the marriage. Not even the difference of our family could stop us from getting married. We shall hide from the world, away from the families. Now I finally realized where my heart was broken."

...

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Yu Yu was pregnant. Felt happiness. Jaws were sore from long hours of smiling. If Ye Juxing saw this, he would be laughing."

...

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

Our child was born. Yu my love was fine. It was a boy and he was named Ye Chong."

Ye Chong froze, his logical formulation of mental schema had gone chaotic! He seemed to have no longer recognized the world.

It took him a while to recover from the shock, during which he realized his hand was held by Rui Bing.

Her eyes were passionately on Ye Chong, her lips could not help but to constantly biting each other upon perceiving Ye Chong's confused stare and a tighter grip.

Somehow these little gestures had given Ye Chong a kind of strength. His eyes grew clear as he nodded at Rui Bing, returned her a grip too. Rui Bing's face reddened while her eyes fixed upon Ye Chong's.

Ye Chong's parents had been revealed. It had always been a

concept more foreign than the red-tailed beasts, the unknown creature across dimension to Ye Chong whenever it came to "home" or "family". He only knew, the closest term to such sense of belonging, "Papa".

He finally realized which Trash Planet the girl in the visual mentioned was, and the recipient too, as well as Shang's point of existence.

So, they were his parents. Out of the sudden, Ye Chong had a strong urge to see their faces. He tried searching through the database, only turning out to be a wild goose chase. He could not see a clear visual of them, and could only pick up a few brief lines from the recording.

He repeated the recording countless times, listened with a passion like it was the first time he heard it.

He imprinted these voices in his head, then he carried on reading the journals.

"XX Month XX Day XX Year

The bloodline of our Ye Chong had always been our worry. What could happen if blood of Ye family and Xue Lai clan came into connection? But the outcome was, surprisingly, positive. The blood test result reflected a clear characteristic of Ye family. Our son would have a great body like his father. Yu my love had conducted test on our son's Xue Lai bloodline too. The result matched, perhaps he could inherit the intelligence and powerful calculation ability of his mother. Well, the downside was, as his mother stated, it was not confirmed even among their own kind.

But, I believe we had made a major discovery! The marriage across both families would not taint and kill the bloodline! This would be significant to both Ye family and Xue Lai clan, though I am not sure if it is applicable on all families. Still, I strongly believe that this would be quite something for every family in the galaxy!"

Ye Luo no longer sounded concise as he was in this entry. One could almost feel his excitement from the writing.

The entry explained everything!

Ye Chong finally understood how he was able to activate Mu/Shang, while having the bloodline, thus the inhumane physique of Ye family.

His mind ran fast, as he pieced everything together.

The reason of his appearance on Trash Planet.

The motive of the MPA, also the Xue Lai clan hunting down Mu/Shang upon seeing him.

The explanation to the fading effect of the toxic of silver liquid in Black Coves.

The strangely terrified reaction of Mu upon seeing the 8-toed claw underground that time.

The reason why Mu/Shang's database contained mostly information from Ye family and Xue Lai clan.

Yes, it all made sense, made perfect sense!

Chapter 594: Teardrop and Spatial Window

Ye Chong took the journal, along with the microchip that contained the mentioned visual out of the mech. No expression could be perceived on his face, not even Rui Bing could discern the thoughts of her man.

Ye Chong then booted the energy management system of the mech for further investigation.

There was one last question unanswered, what kept the mech running for so long? What kind of energy source?

And the details on the glowing interface answered him, as what he had suspected – it was Teardrop, which was not a far-fetched choice for a superior model from a superior family. What he found far-fetched however, was the fact that Shang never thought of utilizing Teardrop for his own energy consumption, despite also being a superior mech model.

No wonder the red-tailed beasts were catching the mech like moths to the flame. All these while, it was because of the energy signature, not the mech.

Ye Chong was not sure how these beasts would use a Teardrop but he was very sure that these beasts wanted it hard.

He dismounted Teardrop and took a look at the circuit. The materials involved might have been considered top-notch back then, but now they appeared obsolete in the eyes of Ye Chong who had mined an inventory full of rare minerals from Darkniss before.

His calm eyes shifted to the piles of dusty bones across the seat, there might not be words from him but his heart was rumbling with something complicated.

Was that ... my father? My true father?

His mind spoke softly, never believing that it would be such a reunion with his father when it happened.

"Ye," Rui Bing's heart ached upon the grimly indifferent expression of Ye Chong, "Let's bury our father." Her hands gripped Ye Chong tight.

He responded with a nod as he began picking up the crumbling bones piece by piece.

Both of them exited the mech. Ye Chong withdrew his dagger, an action foreign to the bewildered Sha Ya as he started digging a hole on the ground to place the pieces.

The experience was not particularly new to Ye Chong since he was also the one who buried Papa back then. He still could remember it like it was yesterday. It was so sad that he feared as Papa was his only relative who had taken good care of him since he was young.

Ye Chong might be apathetic at times, but he was still a child back then. There was fear in him, over losing his only close relative who had been taking care of him since he was still crawling the ground.

And now he was there, watching his signpost of blood and flesh disintegrating into the ashes on the ground. It was a complicated feeling of seeing a reunion having to go like this.

"Let's salute your father....," said Rui Bing softly.

He was not entirely clear about this concept of saluting people but he just imitated Rui Bing's action as he bowed before the tomb thrice.

Ye Chong intended to leave the scene afterwards, as he looked at that old damaged Lazunite gasping for air on the ground. The mech was beyond repair and only components like the detection system were working as if yesterday, with a few glitches that could be fatal to the pilot.

Let ashes be ashes.

Let memories remain as memories.

Let the mech stay the place it was, with its owner for all eternity.

"We are going back," said Ye Chong hoarsely to Sha Ya who was unaware of what happened in the abandoned mech far away from her. Nevertheless, she was fully aware of what should be asked and what should not, so she just remained quiet and followed the order as they returned to Darkniss.

Ye Chong's crew had been following their leader for quite some time so they could tell his mood despite his apparent indifference. Their leader might be a wise and calm one, unexpressive of his emotion yet they demonstrated cautious obedience, as part of their deep respect to Ye Chong their leader.

"My lord, perhaps we could use this window," said Aried as he inched towards Ye Chong.

"What do you propose?" replied Ye Chong as he got back from his deep thoughts. He did not see how one could utilize this dimensional window that broke the surrounding with horrendous cracks, other than killing the place of course.

"Sir, the cracks are fading away," added Sha Ya.

"Fading..." Ye Chong flinched, "away?" That was a plot twist.

"Wait, Sha Ya, did you say 'fading away'?" Aried was astonished too, "Impossible! We did not detect any high energy activity at the surrounding, at least not high enough to stimulate the disintegration."

High energy... activity? Minerals?

Teardrops?

Was it because of Teardrop?

The thought flashed in Ye Chong's mind.

The dimensional cracks were far more denser at Lazunite yet...

Could there be a relationship... between the space distortion activity and Teardrops?

"Sir!" Screamed Sha Ya, "There are formation of dimensional cracks around us! It's increasing!"

Ye Chong jumped up from his throne.

I knew it! It is the Teardrops! It has to be! The Darkniss utilized Teardrops as the source of energy. Of course Aried could not detect any high level of energy activity nearby!

We are the high level energy activity itself!

"Avoid them, Sha Ya, you'll lead us!" Ye Chong commanded as he turned to Aried and said, "We MUST get through the dimensional window, now! Tell me what do you need!"

"But.. but... my lord... We aren't aware of where the dimensional window leads t-"

"I KNOW!" Ye Chong interrupted as he looked at Aried. "We can go anywhere but it's definitely not here! Leave now!"

Aried replied, "Y-yes sir," giving a few dramatic nods.

"What do you need? Report!" said Ye Chong.

Aried pondered for a few moments, "Teardrop. Give me one Teardrop." It was a confident reply from him.

Without hesitation, Ye Chong removed a Teardrop and passed to Aried.

The crew members got busy as bees in the control room, while the rest were looking at the hologram that reflected their upcoming fate.

As we all know, piloting a giant warship to perform hectic and minimal evasion was an art, a tremendously challenging movement that required precise coordination.

Therefore it was justifiable to see the crew members being this tense, as a long chains of command was uttered in shrieks from time to time, from one member to another.

The dimensional cracks were forming at a moderate rate round the ship, which was the saving grace for the crew. If the cracks came a bit faster, they might have to join the stars.

Aried led Sang Kan to the dimensional window as surrounded by a formation of Level 8 shooters. Even though they could not clearly feel the structure of the dimensional window like their Level 9 counterparts, at least they could tell the location.

Aried and Sang Kan began setting up the apparatus, which were all the creation of Aried. Thankfully the ship was well-facilitated, so it did not take him long to build these, especially with the microchip from Ye Chong that contained insane amount of space science information. The Consortium was their aid, ironically.

There were a few blueprints and Aried had built machines upon them, yet no test was actually performed before.

It was a set of 14 silver round disks about half a meter in diameter, with complicated circuits over them. Aried and Sang Kan placed these disks right below the dimensional window.

The crew was curious. Aried was the scholar to them so they were interested in his latest experiment.

Both Aried and Sang Kan first connected all 14 disks and the wiring took them about 30 minutes. They spent the next 10 minutes performing final check.

Aried gestured Sang Kan to back away. He hesitated and eventually left Aried alone far ahead.

Aried was grim, as he installed the Teardrop on the centermost disk.

Beep.

The disk glowed with sea blue energy flowing through the entire circuit over the surface. In no time, the energy reached the other disks too.

Aried was relieved, the apparatus seemed to be working. He began sprinting, sprinting towards the warship. Sang Kan grabbed the running man over his shoulders and ran hurriedly as well.

The moment they got back to the ship, the dimensional window was morphing.

Chapter 595: Return

Ye Chong looked this strange planet sending nostalgia to him. He was having mixed feelings.

Trash Planet-12. The planet where he grew up. He recognized every piece of trash on this planet. The abandoned spaceships, the commander's throne with a broken cushion, the pile of rusty cogs giving one the sharp stench even by just looking at it.

It had been 10 years since he departed from Trash Planet-12 and this filthy home of his remained filthy as ever.

Ever since the Big Bang, the planet had lost its life. Those overwhelming monsters Ye Chong once terrified of, had all been vanquished, annihilated, wiped, as if Judgment Day. He strolled through the pile of debris which looked as if before. Leading Rui Bing, they got home, Ye Chong's home in the past.

"Where is this?" asked Rui Bing.

"Home. I grew up here." The indifferent reply from Ye Chong made Rui Bing grab her man tightly. She could not imagine her beloved living on this trashy place alone as a child before.

Ye Chong's home remained the way when he departed back then. Nothing was touched. No footprint of the notorious Engulfer was even discerned around his home. The Engulfers once always outnumbered the other species with their reproduction, and now they stayed as history, a faint flavor wafting in the palate of Ye Chong. It was a shame to be no longer able to taste some lovely roasted Engulfer.

Well, at least, as conveniently as a lazily written Sci-fi, the daring gamble of the crew plunging into the dimensional window led them to Trash Planet-12. Ye Chong did not notice the window at all, as it was cleverly hidden behind a few space rocks.

Aried was talented after all, since he picked the right blueprint

that produced a window expander. The Darkniss eventually passed through the distortion seamlessly. Nevertheless, the window disintegrated not too long after they had landed on Trash Planet-12. Aried's hypothesis was, the disappearance of the dimensional window could be due to the intensive energy stimulation produced by the machines, which led to destabilization.

Well, assuming that was a dimensional window created by nature, a new one should be coming, though the catch was, no one would know how long it would take, and no one would ever know if it still led to the same place.

Trash Planet-12 was dead, not surprisingly to the denizen. It was meant to be a giant space rubbish dump. The residents around the planet had already been migrated to other planets. The red-tailed beasts might have devoured the entire galaxy as attracted by the metals in it, yet they were never interested in the metallic junks on Trash Planet-12. The junks were substandard after all. They remained on the same spot as ever, quietly.

Ye Chong knew Fal galaxy well. He had the necessary information of the entire galaxy the moment he left Trash Planet, thanks to Mu/Shang.

There was no signal to transmit anything. Apparently the connection had been cut away from the main transmitter a few lightyears away. Well, it made sense. Who would transmit things from a rubbish dump anyway?

Ye Chong, as his instinct told, decided to head to Blue Ocean first. It was the planet where he first met Rui Bing, in her loving white garb and Grandpa Qian, at his little noodle shop. All was fine till a strike came to the Five Galaxies and everyone on Blue Ocean was forced to migrate. Rui Bing and the people he cared moved to Csebesini galaxy and no one knew what had happened to this blueish planet after that.

They got back to the ship and led the ship to the coordinate of

Blue Ocean.

It was a shocking scene when they got there.

It almost felt like a blue Trash Planet-12 when they hopped off the planet. The same ruins, the same silence, the similar stench, the same dead atmosphere. The buildings had fallen. The streets were scattered with yellowish wallpapers. Mechs rested the ground with broken arms. The city was completely destroyed as they saw the puddles of brownish water tainting the street.

They tried shouting but only echoes returned. There was nobody but the packs of red-tailed beasts which just marched before Ye Chong fearlessly. They were the survivors to this chaotic place. Their adaptability gave the citizenship here.

It was expected by Ye Chong, well he was the one who witnessed the higher ranked, 8-toed red-tailed beasts after all.

"No one survived," reported Sang Kan grimly, who saw the destruction by the terrifying beasts the first time. He was utterly blown. He could see how developed the city was in its former glory and now... But, fortunately, he did not discovered dead bodies around, not a large number of them, probably everyone managed to escape before chaos ensued completely.

The production line was probably the area that suffered the most damage due to its abundant supply of batteries. Well, a production line was there... which now only the scraps remained. It was a fact universally acknowledged, that a red-tailed beast in possession of an actual berserk must be in want of immense energy. Ye Chong could verify this fact, throughout all his encounters with the red-tailed beasts, it had and only had always been a snatch of energy. And unfortunately, it had always been the wealthy, authoritative groups that possessed excellent sources of mineral energy, while they, despite their colossal amount of currencies, might not be able to have the security that would protect them from the strike of red-tailed beasts, though they were great runners when it

happened. Nonetheless, Darkniss had far greater rare mineral inventory than these big shots in the Five Galaxies.

It was the nature of red-tailed beasts to compete for resources, but it was apparently not their nature to utilize these energy resources for evolution. Well, if such ability was inborn for them, the galaxies would be a goner by then. Extracting energy from minerals by humanity was seemingly an art, a hardly understood magic in the eyes of these beasts. Red-tailed beasts, in spite of their intelligence, lacked the actual capability of creation. To get energy they only knew how to steal. Certainly, they would steal candies from only babies, they would never pick anything of their own size. If they did, it would only be destruction for them. However, humans, while being possibly the right baby to steal candies from, turned out to be rather resilient to the beasts.

The production line was obviously destroyed. Nothing was left for Ye Chong. He needed information, regarding the current situation in Five Galaxies, on the warfare between red-tailed beasts and humanity.

That would be the only signpost for their discretion.

They were blind at the situation for the moment.

How many "clans" were there accommodating these red-tailed beasts?

Where were these clans?

What could Ye Chong do now?

Eventually, perhaps driven by nostalgia, they headed to Csebesini. While Rui Bing was kidnapped away to He Yue galaxy, Grandpa Qian and the others resided there. Moreover, judging by the intergalactic layout, Csebesini might hold the greatest likelihood of survivals. Well, geographically saying, it should.

Csebesini was not practically the largest among all Five Galaxies, yet it was the transition area interconnected with the other 4

galaxies. Csebesini had always been the neutral member of the party, with an open, welcoming policy that attracted flocks of talents from all over the universe. There was an influx of population during the chaos, making Csebesini no longer the overlooked galaxy among the five as rapid development ensued.

"That was valid till... well, I got knocked out and brought to He Yue," said Rui Bing.

"Sir, we detected threats." Right after Ye Chong got back to Darkniss, the alert came.

There was a small team of red-tailed beasts detected on the visual. Ye Chong, after a careful observation, deduced that these red-tailed beasts were of a far higher rank than those they encountered on Darkniss before. Yup, even higher than those he fought on Planet Yi Ju. The toes were clearly more than 3 on each. The leader was 5-toed. From Ye Chong's experience, a 5-toed red-tailed beast could have been a supreme leader of a smaller clan in Darkniss, yet this 5-toed beast he was seeing merely came from a small team.

One could already imagine the difference in levels now.

They had evolved?

At least the beasts would not evolve all at once out of sudden. In order to initiate evolution, which was to gain that extra toe, to go up in rank, they would need a certain amount of minerals and energy which would increase tremendously each stage of evolution.

The red-tailed beasts seemed to be unaware of Darkniss, probably because of the distance as well as the layer of colloid fungus extract the crew applied at the body of Darkniss.

Ye Chong remained cautious as ever nonetheless.

He sent 100 mechs off to fight. Appilok who was the supreme commander of the mech military unit of the entire crew led the

army, showing the extreme careful measures Ye Chong took.

Appilok did not find this an overkill. He, like the other members of the crew, was fully aware of the ranking system among the red-tailed beasts.

100 mechs went into a curvy formation, inching towards the 28 red-tailed beasts. Like Darkniss, the mechs were also coated with colloid fungus extract so they were invisible to the red-tailed beasts. Appilok was not noticed immediately, even though the leading red-tailed beast seemed to be able to feel his existence as it glanced at the place where Appilok stood. The captain remained undiscovered, even though it was a terrifying scene to behold on the visual in the ship.

Appilok was calm, unshaken by the threat. Fire was held despite seeing the beasts being completely inside their range of weaponry.

Timing and range were the prime factor to determine a successful assassination.

It was not the speed or the strength of the beast that threatened the crew. It was the extrasensory that could assist the beasts in dodging all attacks while making one.

The best way to eliminate the pack would be to fire at close range, densely.

The laser guns were initiated, charging.

And it was that quick charging of mech weaponry that alarmed the red-tailed beasts.

They began scattering!

"Fire." Appilok commanded calmly.

The 100 beams flew over the air and struck upon the 28 beasts.

Chapter 596: Desperation

A combined beam attack was the technique the team had been studying.

In their latest discovery, the distance and the consistency of their shots were the most important, so by utilizing the processors to improvise, this was the outcome of their research.

16 red-tailed beasts had turned into 16 puddles of honeycombs, yet it remained an unsatisfying sight to Appilok. Logically speaking, it was a war of 28 against 100, carried out as an assassination yet only a majority of the wave was cleared - 16 killed, 12 remained. A dense firing that failed rather horribly in Appilok's record. However, he was not puzzled. Being the commander, one must not only wield the charisma but also a mind in peace during the war, in order to make the right decision for the goods of his men.

His previous experience in the warfield had justified that.

"Attack in groups." The next order had been given.

The team Ye Chong was leading now turned out to be much more complicated than before. They had been trained, "improvised" during the ample time they had in Darkniss. Ye Chong did not supervise most of their programs, being a man who was particular about results the most. During the process, Appilok, thanks to the competition and the consistent exposure to practical fights, matured in his leadership.

It was because of this lack of limitation from the author, most of the commanders' ideas were managed to manifest. To be frank, Appilok was the brightest one among them, a genius, literally one made for war strategist whom Ye Chong believed to be on par with Arwa the legend in Gray Valley.

He was also a passionate learner with an open mind. On

occasions where Duan Qian and the others came up with ideas, he would take all of them once proven effective. He just had that practicality from Ye Chong.

100 mechs were segregated into 10 small groups.

They had a detailed set of procedures which was meant to remedy the situation. Everything must be planned beforehand, even if the warfield was capriciously ever-changing. If changes happened, an army could break into chaos for not knowing how to adapt to the situation as a whole.

And this was one of them, based on a highly modified version of Ye Chong's training course by Appilok.

A unit consisted of 10 mechs could fulfill the necessary dexterity and offense density for the war.

The pilots were shooting calmly. They did not really have to aim. They just had to follow the arranged shooting point at an assigned pace. Still, a combined attack that would form an Area-of-Effect attack engulfing the red-tailed beasts straightaway.

The technique was as effective as one could see. No masterly evasion could save any of these red-tailed beasts. Their number shrunk drastically, so were their sanity.

The group led by Appilok remained on hold of their fire. They were ones who scored 98% and above for shooting, the aiming bot themselves. Apparently after the misfortune of the 6-toed red-tailed beast escape, the trainees grew tremendously maniac over mastering their accuracy. That was when the grading set Ye Chong was overthrown as a new, more demanding training came to them in which only less than 10% of the group managed to pass in the first place.

There was hardly anybody who scored above 80% and the trainees certainly had tasted the hardship of their training. It was drilled in their head so hard that they could not help themselves

but to lift their guns to aim whenever they spotted something moving. Despite all that, the training was very effective. Their performance was climbing while a few of them, driven by their passion, were able to obtain a perfect score.

Those who scored above 95% were considerably a true sniper mech pilot. And among the approximately 4000 trainees, only 234 of them managed to earn this complete liberty of unsupervised shooting in the warfield. The normal pilots would inform these snipers to clear the more troubling foes. These snipers also had the responsibility of protecting the commanders in the dark. So, in order to carry out these tasks, Ye Chong had produced them a mech model specialized in target-locking.

The red-tailed beasts were eventually swarmed upon by the combined beams.

A sudden raid unforeseen by the red-tailed beasts it was.

One of the red-tailed beasts managed to escape the combined attack, bleeding as it held its throat in disbelief.

One mech next to Appilok placed down the gun. He made the shot.

It was a rather quick fight, as only the leader of the red-tailed beasts remained on the field, in immense fury of course. It was always the one breaking the field and now it was the one going to be broken. Its enemies had never decreased, which brought confusion to it. It had wrecked a large number of them at different places before, it almost felt like a bunch of walking target dummies to the beast yet... how? When did these metallic target dummies got stronger?

Then the last beam came, blinding its eyes, then its life.

...(In Darkniss)...

Ye Chong had been observing the field.

The red-tailed beasts had definitely evolved, as expected by Ye

Chong though. So his surprise was because of capabilities of not the beasts but his trainees.

He had never put in actual effort in training these trainees as he was already preoccupied by lots of mundane and puzzling works. He was only the mastermind, not the master coach, even during the R&D process of their military techniques.

Appilok was indeed a genius!

First step had been completed and there was no time for more exclamation or even celebration. This would only be the beginning.

He was right.

There were more red-tailed beasts, a whole lot more of them.

The entire Fal galaxy had been raided by red-tailed beasts. He was unsure of the situation in other galaxies. He must follow his plan - to Csebesini!

Darkniss, thanks to the special coating at its armor, was totally invisible to all detection system from distance. Ironically such attribute had also put them at disadvantage. They were undetected, therefore the red-tailed beasts literally crashed into them during the journey. The beasts could not see them, yet they could sense its existence.

The battle units were busy as bees while showering the beams upon the beasts, at an attempt to wipe them out quick. On one wave, one 6-toed red-tailed beast made a close escape, after which the number of red-tailed beasts increased in the following waves. Darkniss was in the dense sensory of countless red-tailed beasts, thus losing its former invisibility.

That was when the red-tailed beasts made their first full swing attack.

Darkniss maintained its high momentum as the bloody carcasses trailed. It sounded like a simple kill-and-go but both Appilok and

Ye Chong could smell the upcoming trouble. The red-tailed beasts seemed to all coming for them. The war grew harder each day and mortality was perceived on Darkniss.

"The number of red-tailed beasts encountered yesterday was a 20% increase compared to the day before yesterday, while on today, at this point of time, the figure had exceeded the day before, with a potential to reach a 50% increase." Reported Appilok, with slight worry.

"The figures... they are climbing..."

Appilok looked at Ye Chong while he further elaborated, "Yes sir, I believe, all these were an organized attack. And no doubt the figure would only increase further. Unless we come up with a feasible plan, we would be surrounded soon. We had lost 28 men today, with 6 injuries too."

Ye Chong nodded, he knew the situation well. The mortality was because of fatigue. The trainees never had the chance to rest given how frequent the waves came, thus certain amateur mistakes which obviously costed their life during the process.

At one point, the pole would snap, the Darkniss would fall.

And they still were 3 days away from warping point to Csebesini.

Ye Chong pondered.

"Reduce the range of defense. All pilots must rest. Now." He turned his head, "The shooters would take over and they must at least last for a day. Sha Ya, you'll take this mission."

"Yes," nodded Sha Ya in serenity. She walked away.

Appilok gave a sigh of relief.

"Order them to retreat now. All units would be prohibited from the warfield for the rest of the day."

"Yes sir!"

The mechs surrounding Darkniss began heading back to their

mothership. during which they covered for each other.

And the red-tailed beasts were smiling.

It was an opportunity to attack.

They flooded upon Darkniss, like locusts.

Chapter 597: Escape

Without any forewarning, countless beams spurted out of Darkniss. Compared to the combined attacks by the sniper mech pilots, the parapsychic sensible shooters were much more capable at delivering consistent accurate attacks, as their beams rained rhythmically at an exact order, causing Darkniss to look like a laser porcupine.

The dense wave of red-tailed beasts were impaled by the lights.

The most fearsome part was how almost every red-tailed beast was slaughtered by their throat. The aiming was more inhuman than the beasts themselves. Only 5 survived with severe injuries while the rest was killed on spot.

Among the crowd, a few packs of highly ranked red-tailed beasts even decided to retreat immediately, as fear imprinted on their distorted expression. It was the first time Ye Chong seeing such fright in them. What had seriously caused them such fright?

A few thoughts and he realized why. He recalled the content of the visuals left on Lazunite the abandoned mech, on which the log said only high-ranked red-tailed beasts could escape as they led their subordinates. Thus, they must possess a kind of sensibility like Sha Ya. Given that, they must be able to sense the overwhelming parapsychic forces coming from Sha Ya and the others.

It was an army consisted of 600 Level 6 shooters, under assistance of 3 Level 7 shooters and 6 Level 8 shooters, all under Sha Ya who was a Level 9 shooter. The forces exerted was so grand that even an airhead like Ye Chong felt the illogical distress taking over him, while those low-ranked red-tailed beasts tripping dead as they sprinted.

Well, a monster remained as a threat even when it was in fear, be they tripping or running away. Sha Ya did not intend to let them

go. She might be a strong shooter, but that did not convince her to be boastful and hot-tempered. Her strength had also given her temperance, a clarity in mind.

That was when she convinced the world, what a true expert like a Level 9 shooter was, as she raised her weapon and poured 66 beams which bloomed like blossom from the cabin.

None of them missed.

50 5-toed red-tailed beasts and 16 6-toed red-tailed beasts had been pierced.

Even Ye Chong had a second of bewilderment upon the sight. A 6-toed red-tailed beast was not much of an issue for him. He probably could clear a small wave of them in his Celest, but Sha Ya only raised her firearm and a large pack of the beasts vanished in blinding lights.

The sailors in Darkniss were feeling pumped.

Jin Weidong, after the training in Sea of Threads, had his skills dramatically improved like the other shooters, while they seemed to have a sign of elevating to Level 9.

The amount of effort to go from Level 8 to Level 9 was almost astronomical, yet they were making something.

Thanks to the shooters who were able to dish out massive damage, the battle was ending rather soon after.

Nonetheless, a new wave had arrived.

Ye Chong knew there would be a new wave very soon as he could see how organized the attack was. Clearly the red-tailed beasts wanted to win the war by outnumbering humanity.

The war was strangely intense.

The energy meter on Darkniss depleted quickly. Luckily the Darkniss utilized energy crystal as its source of energy, which contained far more energy content than the batteries commonly

used in the Five Galaxies. And Ye Chong had an inventory full of them. If he did not supply enough energy crystals they probably would inevitably lose the battle due to an immobile ship.

Darkniss was traveling at full speed and any incoming red-tailed beast was immediately killed.

That sounded simple, but the ship was still lagging behind the schedule even under the godly hand of Sha Ya, as the waves only thickened each time. The red-tailed beasts were fearless, unafraid of death, as they came back again and again, pouncing at Darkniss.

Many of the shooters had fully depleted their parapsychic strength as they collapsed at the cabin. The medical team was running from one corridor to another.

Sha Ya remained as the most amazing warrior at the scene, as her shooting frequency and accuracy were retained at high levels. She was not only strong but also very sustainable in war field, which had won over respects of the shooters. At this point of time, only Jin Weidong's team could catch up with her shooting pace. Well, Ye Chong could see them losing the race soon.

Sha Ya had maintained shooting at a high frequency, high accuracy for SIX hours. The data was astounding to the folks. She was given the Ye Chong treatment by the people as they wondered if she was a human. They thought only the master could have honored such inhumanity, yet there was Sha Ya, deconstructing their perceived idea again.

And finally the war seemed to be coming to an actual end.

The mortality of red-tailed beasts was beyond their control. The shooters estimated at least 7000 kills in the past 6 hours, which the figure was sufficient to form a "clan".

Ye Chong lost about 361 shooters, all because of extreme parapsychic fatigue.

According to the shooters, apparently it was not a norm for them

to fight a long term war, since most outcomes happened in split seconds for them. Ye Chong did not want to drain them at first, but he was left with no other choice. The pilots had fallen and he had no backup force.

Fortunately the fatigue was not fatal to them, though it was hard to tell when they would wake up again - not a good news for Ye Chong.

The pilots would at least need 10 hours to regain their stamina. And so far only 6 hours had lapsed while most of the shooters had collapsed. If they had encountered another wave as frenzy as the previous, there would be problems.

But the wave seemed to have ceased, as Ye Chong looked at the floating carcasses around the void. It was a horrendous sight, a nightmare fuel. The crew members had gotten used to such sight however.

The escaped red-tailed beasts did not flee from the scene right away. Instead, they tailed Darkniss at a fixed distance. They were alert yet no action was taken ,yet.

Well, as long as they did not launch the attack, Darkniss would be safe.

Ye Chong sighed in a relief. He needed that catch of his breath.

As long as they lasted the following hours, all would be good.

The shooters did not leave the firing chamber, they remained as alert while eyeing those beasts far behind. They needed to last till the pilots got back online.

The large pack of red-tailed beasts army were following Darkniss and no one knew what could happen next. It was such a restless situation. But at least the captain seemed calm at the moment. The crew members believed everything was still under Ye Chong's control.

Clearly they would be led to safety!

The captain was the greatest!

That was how the trainees saw Ye Chong. They knew it well, on how they would remain as the most peasantly peasant, the most trashy trash in the world if they did not meet the master. So, everything was for the master, by the master, of the master.

The faithfulness was almost a blind one. Appilok might have been their military leader, but it was this indifferent quiet young man who had given them the necessary mental support.

Ye Chong loved the obedient red-tailed beasts, as he prompted Darkniss to travel faster towards the warping point.

It felt strange the following days. The red-tailed beasts, as if they had been given enough punishments, behaved. Ye Chong could not foresee their next diabolical plan but he was feeling much more at ease. After all, his pilot army had fully recovered, all ready for battle. Most of the shooters had also regained consciousness.

Even if the red-tailed beasts decided to launch the attack, he could take them all just fine.

"Captain!"

And that was when he could already see the warping point.

He looked at the marching red-tailed beasts behind, a brief smile cracked his usual coldness, "Accelerate, prepare for space warp."

"Perform space warp!" shouted the sailor.

Engines were all turned on, Darkniss blasted off into...

nothing?

That was what the red-tailed beasts witnessed.

In the midst of confusion, the giant metallic enemy disappeared.

Well, they might have evolved but this entire space-jumping Einstein rocket science was beyond their comprehension.

Chapter 598: Mutual Understanding

The warship Darkniss had just completed its warp jump when it stumbled upon a situation.

A full blown war was happening right in front of them. Ye Chong stayed in the background. He needed time to assess the battle. The fleet was huge, with probably over a hundred ships.

Ye Chong soon came to the conclusion that the fleet must belong to some aristocratic family, or a powerful organization. This was apparent from the starship designs. The fleet had encountered a large group of red-tailed beasts. From the looks of it, the battle had been going on for some time. Mech squads were scattered about the fleet. They seemed to be inferior to the red-tailed beasts, but had the advantage in numbers.

After observing the battle for a while, Ye Chong found himself taken aback.

"What rotten skills." Sang Kan commented dismissively. He had good reason to look down on the mech pilots. The mechs were lacking in both group and solo combat abilities. He found the mech pilots to be quite disappointing.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong shook his head. This surprised Sang Kan. He did not think he was wrong. If all the students on their ship were on par with those mech pilots, he would definitely terminate their instructor, with or without the good sir's orders.

Ye Chong did not explain himself as he continued observing the battle. After a while more, he felt even more certain of his speculation. It seemed that the Five Galaxies had been progressing in his absence. Darkniss had slaughtered many red-tailed beasts, and Ye Chong knew that exactly how his students would fare against the mech pilots from the Five Galaxies. Any average mech pilot from He Yue Galaxy would be considered a professional in the Five Galaxies.

Even He Yue Galaxy's mech pilots were unlikely to win against red-tailed beasts, but these mech pilots from the Five Galaxies were able to force the war into a stalemate through their advantage in numbers. This was a big surprise for Ye Chong, since he never expected the Five Galaxies to survive the red-tailed beasts.

These were his thoughts that he did not share with Sang Kan.

Sang Kan studied the war with a look of puzzlement. There must be a reason for the good sir to disagree with him, so he looked harder at the battle to see what he was missing. After a while, he hummed in surprise. "The fleet commander is good!"

Next to Ye Chong was Appilok on standby. He nodded and commented solemnly, "An expert! It's incredible!" He looked very serious.

By now, many more people had noticed this. The truth was, the mech pilots in combat were not particularly skilled, or just simply weak, but they had kept the war at a stalemate despite this. There must be an outstanding commander who could identify the enemy's vulnerabilities and command the fleet accordingly.

The scariest part was, the commander had excellent insights. Whether it was in the bigger picture or the smallest details, the commander had planned flawlessly. The mech pilots carried out their orders without hesitation or doubt. Hence, the war had arrived at a stalemate.

Appilok looked more and more shaken. His forehead was beaded with sweat.

What a terrifying commander! He could not help but felt that he may never reach that level of skills. However, he quickly reigned in his own emotions. All the mech pilots trained by Ye Chong were mentally tough. Appilok quickly rectified his attitude. His eyes glowed with ambition.

In fact, Appilok was asking too much of himself. He was still

young, and had not received proper leadership training. Everything he learned was through experience. Only a genius could reach where he was given the circumstances. As long as he continued to learn and gather experiences, he will certainly reach greater heights.

Sang Kan could not appreciate the commander's skills, but Sang Pu definitely would have.

The warship Darkniss did not draw any attention after completing its warp jump. Appilok and others looked to Ye Chong. They were waiting for his orders. Should they go to the rescue, or not? If not, where should they go next? Ye Chong must make decide for them.

Ye Chong's wandered to one of the starships on the holographic screen. Suddenly, his expression turned into a mixture of emotions. Rui Bing quickly noticed the changes in him. She found it curious. Ye Chong rarely showed an expression like that. What had he seen?

She followed Ye Chong's gaze and could not help but gasped.

In the warship's bridge was a woman of about 28 years of age, with a few burly men and an old man standing around her at attention. She wore gold rimmed glasses that rested on her small nose. Her gentle face showed great determination. Her eyes were sharp, following movements on the holographic screens around her as she tapped lightly and rhythmically on the main control board.

"Squads 10, 19 and 21, assist starship Mo Yun immediately." Her voice was deep and silky.

The burly men around her were not affected by her seductive voice. They quickly passed the order down. Starship Mo Yun looked like it was still faring well, but no one questioned her orders. They believed that the Young Miss must be right.

As expected, just as the three mech squads arrived at Mo Yun, the situation turned sideways. A large group of red-tailed beasts had arrived.

All the crew members were in awe of their Young Miss's almost prophetic abilities. Without her, they could not have survive for so long.

Ye Chong and his crew saw what happened as well. Appilok looked taken aback. More sweat appeared on his forehead. Even in the highly complex situation they were in, the commander was able to pinpoint the enemy's next move precisely. It was shocking!

"Prepare to assist." Ye Chong's order brought Appilok back to the present. He could read nothing from his commander's expression, and did not know what he was thinking.

Appilok composed himself. "Yes sir!"

Despite seeing the chaos outside, Appilok did not hesitate and ran out of the bridge. At the same time, orders for their mech squads to prepare to deploy began to ring throughout the warship.

Rui Bing stood beside Ye Chong and looked at the holographic screen worriedly.

"Young Miss, look!" A crew member pointed at one of the holographic screens and gasped in surprise.

There was no need for his warning. Gu Qing saw what was happening. She kept this region under close watch. If she had anymore elite squads, she would have deployed them all to that region. It would give her the power to control the course of the war. However, she had lost almost all her elite mech pilots. There was not enough manpower to undergo this task.

A hundred laser beams shot through the red-tailed beast horde. The animals scurried about in confusion.

Gu Qing was surprised. Her breathing turned rapid, bringing a blush rising to her cheeks. The poker faced burly men around her

finally could not help but swallowed deeply.

Gu Qing did not seem to notice. She was focused entirely on the holographic screen. There was nothing at all to see. She responded swiftly with a loud order. "Quick, switch to optical mode."

The crew members around jolted awake from their reverie and rushed to switch to optical mode.

The image on the screen changed immediately.

A fleet of about 500 mechs were pushing their way into the horde of red-tailed beasts.

The mech were powerful. In particular, their laser guns could shoot a big, bloody hole in the creatures. Their battle strategy was unique, with clear roles of offense. The mechs at the front line all fired in unison, while the mechs behind them guarded the flanks and rear. This unique strategy and with their powerful laser guns were enough to open a path in the animal horde with ease.

Nevertheless, Gu Qing was not surprised because of this. Instead, she saw how the mech squad had chosen the perfect time and location to make their entry. This showed that their leader was capable.

If this strong mech squad was led by an excellent commander, they would surely make a name for themselves.

Gu Qing knew what she had to do next. She gave the order without delay. "Squads 1, 5, 9 and 16, disperse and surround the red-tailed beasts. Keep them distracted."

"Squads 3 and 7, move towards the starships. Make way."

This was all she could now. Now, she could only hope that the commander of the other party understood her actions.

She stared at the holographic screen in suspense. Her orders were actually a huge risk. If the other party did not understand her and respond accordingly, the war would be lost for good.

She did not notice that her knuckles were turning white from gripping too tightly. Her characteristic calmness yielded to the pressure in this decisive moment.

Appilok quickly noticed the changes on the other side. He was slightly taken aback, but also deeply impressed. Without further delay, he rounded up the entire squad and traced a beautiful arc in space. The mech pilots demonstrated their remarkable skills in this maneuver. They made a sharp veer without losing formation.

Gu Qing immediately felt relieved. She knew that the other party had understood her.

Gu Qing studied the holographic screen with amusement as the mech squad charged straight in. Squads 3 and 7 had drew close to the starships around them to make way for the squad. Thus, these newcomers could unleash their maximum potential.

The battle outcome was decided.

Gu Qing was only interested in a few things now. Where did this powerful mech squad come from? Who did they serve?

Chapter 599: Xi Ding Defense Line

The Gu Family of Tian Luo Galaxy - a widely influential aristocratic family, was now in great danger. As a historical empire of the Tian Luo Galaxy, they had a strong base in the Galaxy, but nevertheless were helpless against the red-tailed beasts. In recent years, the Gu Family began to decline. With the disappearance of Gu Shaoze, the Gu Family lost a technical genius. For Gu Qing, she had lost someone very important to her.

Gu Shaoze was her only younger brother.

The ramifications were complicated. Gu Shaoze was the designated heir to the Family. His disappearance plunged the Gu Family into a state of turmoil. People who meant ill towards the Family began to make their moves. The lower level members of the Family panicked. When Gu Qing had moved past her grief, the Gu Empire was nearly destroyed.

All this while, Gu Shaoze had never liked dealing with family affairs. The one who really ran the Gu Empire was his sister, Gu Qing. In this crisis, Gu Qing commanded the Gu Family's most loyal servants without hesitation. Few people knew of this powerful group who served the direct line of the family. They existed precisely for situations like this.

Gu Family's internal affairs were swiftly managed. Gu Qing then took a series of precautionary steps to stabilize the Gu Family's inner circle. The lower members of the Family witnessed for the first time the determination and austerity behind the mellow facade of the Family's Eldest Young Miss.

Nevertheless, the Gu Family suffered losses because of the ordeal. Gu Qing faced the situation bravely, but just as the Family regained some of its power, the red-tailed beasts struck.

The invasion of the red-tailed beasts began at Tappero Galaxy. The creatures spread rapidly across the entire Galaxy. Few people

managed to escape. Most of the residents in the Galaxy lost their lives in the invasion. The once prosperous Tappero Galaxy fell quickly. People from the other four Galaxies were shocked and afraid. Gu Qing soon realized that they must leave Tian Luo Galaxy as soon as possible.

However, the red-tailed beasts expanded their reach faster than she expected. The Family only managed to pack their most important assets on their starships. They did not even have time to load normal supplies.

Not many people managed to escape from Tian Luo Galaxy, but the Gu Family survived. The Gu Family was not the strongest military presence in Tian Luo Galaxy, but stronger organizations had fallen despite the fact. This was mostly because of Gu Qing.

Gu Qing was a masterful leader. Without her, their fleet would have perished.

After all the hardships they had been through in their escape, all of the Gu Family fell in line behind their Eldest Young Miss. No one imagined that their Eldest Young Miss, who was placed in charge of managing their Empire, was also capable in commanding a fleet. The truth was, the older generation had groomed her to become her brother's advisor. This gave her the opportunity to learn these skills.

Her military strategies allowed the Family to balance the odds in the war. Her outstanding capabilities as their leader brought them so far. However, the Family had paid a heavy price for their survival. Only a fifth of the starship fleet survived so far in their journey.

Just as they were feeling grateful for arriving in Csebesini Galaxy, the red-tailed beasts appeared.

...

Where did this squad of mechs come from? Gu Qing watched the

holographic screen in bafflement. She was surprised by the strength of the newcomers. All of mech pilots were extremely skilled. So far, none of the mechs were damaged or lost.

Besides, they totaled at least 500 in numbers.

Gu Qing had never heard of any organization with this much power. She was very curious about their background.

Appilok was focused entirely in the battle. He was also in good spirits, having been inspired by the performance of the other party's commander. Appilok led his squad with exemplary skills. The red-tailed beasts were taken aback by his strategies, and were momentarily caught off guard.

After recuperating for a few days from their last intense battle, the students were restored to their best conditions. They had been bludgeoning their way through red-tailed beasts in this new world. This comparably small horde of red-tailed beasts were a walk in the park.

The battle ended quickly.

None of the red-tailed beasts escaped. Ye Chong learned his lesson. If they encountered red-tailed beasts, never let any of them escape alive, or risk being attacked by an even larger hoard of them.

Gu Qing forced herself to calm down. A 15-kilometer long extravagant warship had suddenly appeared behind her. Anyone would be surprised by it. Gu Qing found herself chilled once again by the numerous surprises she had today.

She studied the cold, young man before her carefully. He must be the captain of the warship.

Ye Chong took a measured glance at Gu Qing, and spoke after a moment's consideration. "Are you from the Gu Family of Tian Luo Galaxy?"

Gu Qing was taken aback. Could this young man be related to the

Family? She composed herself and nodded. "Yes. I am the current head of the family, Gu Qing. And you are?" Gu Qing spoke confidently and steadily like a true leader, betraying no signs of her anxiety.

"Do you know Gu Shaoze?" Ye Chong shook off his memories and asked. He admired Gu Shaoze deeply. Anyone who could design a highly desirable mech like Guardian must be very talented.

Gu Qing's expression froze. All the calmness she showed vanished. Her eyes lit up with hope. Overwhelmed with emotions, she reached out to grab Ye Chong's hands and asked, "You - Do you know where Shaoze is? ..." She choked up.

Ye Chong carefully avoided Gu Qing and replied flatly, "You need to calm down."

Gu Qing felt like she was struck by lightning. She lowered her head and bit down on her lips until they bled.

After a while of silence, she looked up with a calmer expression. The Gu Family's people around her all looked sorrowful. They knew how close she was with her younger brother.

Ye Chong saw Gu Qing looking calmer, and began to tell her the story of his encounter with Gu Shaoze. When Gu Qing heard him speak of Gu Shaoze taking his last breath, her eyes dimmed with grief. However, the grief was quickly replaced with calmness.

Only when Gu Qing caressed Guardian's smooth surface that the grief in her eyes surfaced once again.

Rui Bing sighed quietly and consoled her softly. Gu Qing could not help but hugged Guardian tightly and sobbed loudly. The rest of the people left the room to give her space.

With Gu Qing onboard, Ye Chong finally had a better understanding of the situation in the Five Galaxies.

The only place that was considered safe was Csebesini Galaxy. The Galaxy was able to fend off the red-tailed beasts because of the

massive establishment of what they called the "Xi Ding Defense Line".

When the invasion of the red-tailed beasts first started, Csebesini's authorities quickly began works on the Xi Qing Defense Line.

123 large space stations formed the center of this defense line. All the space stations were always on standby, with enough supplies to assist other space stations or defend themselves. Between the space stations were numerous laser gun satellites that ensured total destruction of any enemies that attempted to trespass.

Compared to the laser beam gun that Ye Chong had used before, these were used on a much grander scale. People from around all around Csebesini Galaxy came together to build this defense line, protecting their home. So far, none of the red-tailed beast hordes had breached their defense line.

The red-tailed beasts could not do warp jumps, so they need not worry about ambushes. Word was when the defense line was almost completed, a horde of red-tailed beasts attacked. They had no choice but to send mechs out for battle. After sacrificing nearly a thousand lives to buy them three more hours, the defense line was finally completed. The first thing the soldiers manning the space stations did was to open fire at full capacity.

More than a thousand red-tailed beasts were shot to ashes. Ever since then, the Xi Ding Defense Line became the strongest defense for mankind. Under its protection, residents of Csebesini Galaxy could live in relative safety.

As more and more people joined Csebesini, the defense line grew larger and larger. Xi Ding Defense Line now consisted of three inner layers and three outer layers of defense. The number of space stations increased from the initial 123 to 360. It was nearly impossible for the red-tailed beasts to breach this defense line.

When Rui Bing heard that Csebesini was safe, she felt greatly

relieved.

Gu Qing hoped to seek protection under Csebesini, and Ye Chong agreed to it after some thought. He did not exactly need to enter Csebesini Galaxy for now. The defense line would keep the Galaxy safe from red-tailed beasts, at least in the near future.

Instead, he needed to return to He Yue Galaxy as soon as possible to regroup with the Sang Tribe, and then clear the Gateway to Gray Valley and reunite with Mu/Shang. However, since Darkniss needed to replenish its supplies, he agreed for a trip to Csebesini Galaxy.

Gu Qing was soon grateful for deciding to join Ye Chong's fleet. They encountered a few hordes of red-tailed beasts along the way, but Ye Chong's mech pilots made easy work of the creatures.

The mech pilots were strong! They were even stronger than the best soldiers in the Family. Their mechs, on the other hand ... As the head of the Gu Family, which was also a large mech manufacturer, Gu Qing appreciated the power and significance behind these mechs. Besides, how did these people manage to hide their massive warship from holographic scanning?

What were these people?

Gu Qing was also pleasantly surprised when Ye Chong agreed to train the Gu Family's mech pilots.

The results were apparent in the coming days. Gu Qing was not a combatant, but she could see that her mech pilots were quickly transformed from their training.

Gu Qing wished the journey would go on longer, so that her mech pilots could improve themselves. Given their circumstances, it was highly desirable to have competent military strength.

"This is the Xi Ding Defense Line."

Gu Qing made the introductions. She behaved carefully on the warship Darkniss. Even though she was head of the family, she was

not foolish enough to flaunt her position in front of Ye Chong. She answered all questions from Ye Chong and Rui Bing without reservation, and did not actively seek to understand the warship she was on. Nevertheless, she was still able to deduce some shocking results from the subtle signs around her.

This was a very powerful military organization. They had impressive tech and capable mech pilots. Strict discipline was enforced by an outstanding commander.

Gu Qing spoke frequently with Appilok, but mostly on military strategies. Appilok was eager to learn and experienced in battle. He was also creative but meticulous, making him an excellent commander. This was a truly powerful legion of soldiers, no matter how she looked at it.

However, Gu Qing did not fail to realize that the cold young man was the real person in charge of this warship. In fact, Gu Qing got along well with Rui Bing. They rarely spoke of Ye Chong, but whenever he was mentioned, she always noticed the deep admiration shown by the crew members around her.

What a mysterious young man.

Countless laser gun satellites were scattered along the defense line. The massive space stations were in sight.

It was possible to enter Csebesini Galaxy through spatial warp jumps and bypass the Xi Ding Defense Line. This provided the humans a route inside. Nevertheless, many combatants were stationed at the warp jump points to prevent attacks by space pirates.

"Oh, here comes a big one." The surveillance staff member whistled. "Luxurious starships are rare these days."

Another staff member peered at the 15-kilometer long starship on the holographic screen and commented without enthusiasm, "Yeah, but the military's gonna get a big kick from this. They liked

this kind of ship."

"True. The ship is just the right size to be modified as a warship."

Ye Chong had ordered for the colloid fungus substance to be removed from the ship's hull to avoid suspicion.

Finally, they entered Csebesini Galaxy. Skyscrapers and mechs dominated the skies. The Gu Family members were moved to tears upon this familiar sight that once had seemed so far away from them.

Compared to them, Darkniss's crew members felt very curious instead.

It was hard for a large starship like theirs to avoid attention.

Soon, a mech squad approached them.

Chapter 600: Walking a Tightrope

200 mechs were heading their way, fast. In the many years he was away, the mechs models in the Five Galaxies had changed a lot. Ye Chong could no longer tell their make. These were probably a prefabricated model. The mech had a pair of gray and blue colored fins and a compact body. It was designed for better flexibility in movements.

Appilok frowned. He could see that these mechs were in combat mode. He could not accept this open display of hostility.

He took a glance at Ye Chong, and the man shook his head. These 200 mechs were no threat to Darkniss. Their warship had the toughest hull in the world, and can surely protects its crew from normal mech attacks. Ye Chong did not want to escalate the situation. Once upon a time, he would have opened fire without hesitation. However, now that he had grown mature, he realized that he had no time to instigate unnecessary altercations.

"Let me handle this." Gu Qing offered. She was the head of the Gu Family, after all. This was usual business for her.

Ye Chong nodded. It was better to have Gu Qing deal with this kind of problem.

Both parties were soon in contact.

"Please identify yourselves." A cold voice hailed them.

"Gu Family of Tian Luo." Gu Qing replied succinctly.

"Welcome to Csebesini Galaxy." The usherer spoke rigidly. "We welcome anyone other than space pirates to our Galaxy. Immigration is notified of your arrival. They will soon assign you with accommodation. Please lend us your cooperation."

"I see." Gu Qing replied plainly. Of course she knew what sort of accommodation they would be getting. However, they should just be thankful that they survived. It was impossible to keep Gu

Family whole given their circumstances. Csebesini Galaxy's authorities would never allow any forces that could threaten their position to regroup.

"By our latest military rulings, all large starships will be expropriated and modified as warships for our defense against the red-tailed beasts. We will offer compensation according to the market price of your ship."

"What?" Gu Qing was taken aback. She realized what a huge mistake this would be, and quickly replied, "No!"

Sweat beaded on her forehead. She understood very well the nature of this conflict. Ye Chong would never give up his warship.

"Please reconsider." The other party's hostility was clear. It was only to be expected, since anyone who seek their protection must pay the price. All the aristocratic families that came this way had surrendered their large starships without argument.

Gu Qing saw Appilok gesturing to his subordinates in the background and began to panic. Her mind raced for a solution as she spoke, "We need to keep our starship. You may have all our supplies onboard. In exchange, we will not seek compensation."

"I'm afraid that's not possible. I must abide by the military rulings." The other party pushed her.

The crew of Darkniss had never been treated this way before, and felt indignant about it. If Ye Chong was not here, they would have shot down all the 200 mechs in front of them. Even Sha Ya looked angered. She had only ever been humiliated like this twice - once by Sun Sieha, and another by Ye Chong. One was the King, and the other her master. These, she could accept.

Shooters placed great importance in honor and respect. The unreasonable demands made by the other party was clearly a challenge to them.

Appilok gestured towards a crew member besides him. The latter

noded in understanding.

Ye Chong did not want to escalate the situation, but he would not simply lie down in compliance. Besides, Ye Chong could tell from the other party's attitude that there was no room for negotiation.

If that was the case, a demonstration of greater power would encourage greater cooperation.

Ye Chong nodded at Appilok. Gu Qing saw them, and closed her eyes in despair. She knew that once the fight began, they would be put on the defensive.

Appilok was prepared to give the order. "Warning fire!"

12 laser beams shot out from Darkniss towards the mechs.

The throats of 12 mechs were shot. The mechs lost their balance fell from the sky. Boom! The 12 mechs made 12 craters in the ground, kicking up dust around them. None of the mechs exploded, but they were already rendered useless.

When the ship fired, Wei Zheng's immediate thought was, "Are they crazy? Don't they understand the situation they're in? Don't they realize that they are the ones seeking protection here?"

When the 12 mechs were shot down, Wei Zheng was surprised by their accuracy. He was also relieved when the mechs did not explode. After all, he had a close relationship with his subordinates.

However, the next thing he thought of chilled him to the bones. He now realized the distance between him and the ship, and how difficult it must be to shoot down the mechs at the throat without making them explode.

Sniper mech pilots!

Wei Zheng swallowed heavily. He thought he was going crazy. Sniper mech pilots, at least a dozen of them, were on that ship. What could this possibly mean?

It meant that ... He wanted to turn tail and run, knowing that his comrades were easily shot down from this distance. In other words, if they started shooting at each other, he would be first to be shot down.

He could feel the God of Death running the blade of His scythe against his face. The cold sense of dread spread across his entire body.

Sniper mech pilots were known for their abilities to turn the tides of a battle. The first thought that people usually had on sniper mech pilots was not how strong they were, but how rarely they came by.

There were 12 sniper mech pilots in this starship, and Wei Zheng found himself paralyzed by the thought.

One sniper mech pilot was scary enough, but if 12 mech pilots banded together ... Wei Zheng felt goosebumps all over him.

He immediately sent out a request for backup. It was better to let the higher-ups handle this.

Wei Zheng ordered his men to back down slowly. The longer they stayed so close to the ship, the more nervous he felt.

However, four laser beams quickly graced past the four mechs at the rear end. This warning stopped the entire squad's retreat.

"Consider your next actions carefully. Your provocative actions will only threaten your safety ..." A laser beam shot past his mech's throat, off by a mere centimeter.

Time seemed to pass so slowly that it drove Wei Zheng crazy. He and his men all felt nervous. No one expected to encounter such a difficult visitor. The Gu Family of Tian Luo was not your average aristocratic family. Everyone sighed quietly about their misfortune to have to deal with this arrogant organization.

The other starships from the Gu Family did not know what was happening, but since Darkniss had fired, it was natural to assume

that there had been a disagreement with the mechs. Having travelled together for awhile, they had come to think of Darkniss as one of their own. Since the mech pilots of Darkniss had also trained their mech pilots, they were more ready to side with Darkniss.

Thus, they made their move.

The starships immediately broke their current formation and regrouped into battle formation. All the ships raised their battle alarms. The combatants rushed to their positions.

Gu Qing watched their reactions with worry. It seemed that they would have to go along with Darkniss. After the initial shock, she quickly gathered herself and reassessed their situation. I turned out that this might be a good opportunity. Ye Chong's background was a mystery, but she knew how much power he had on his side.

She had been focusing on going to Csebesini Galaxy that she had not considered about joining forces with him. The risk was great, but then the Gu Family would remain together. It also meant that the Gu Family's fate would be tied with this man.

Gu Qing was always decisive. She made her decision quickly.

With orders coming directly from Gu Qing, the other Gu Family members acted more confidently. They were now prepared for a shootout.

The Gu Family's adamant display left Wei Zheng deeply unsettled. The backup squad was still not here, and he cursed them inside for being so eager to share his better moments but refused to show up when trouble arrived.

Wei Zheng did not know that the matter had shocked Csebesini's authorities. This was the first incident of its kind ever since the red-tailed beasts appeared. Their opponent was the Gu Family, but no one wanted them to set a precedent for fear of the many unpleasant consequences in future.

If they set a precedent, new visitors would surely imitate them. The local authorities would find their position in jeopardy.

Hence, they gave strict orders to the soldiers stationed nearby to destroy the Gu Family's fleet if they refused to follow orders. To deter other parties from disobedience, the authorities decided to stream the battle live to Csebesini Galaxy.

Since soldiers were deployed to the warp jump point to prevent space pirates from entering, there were many soldiers in the vicinity, numbering close to 100 thousand.

News of there being 12 sniper mech pilots reached the local authorities as well. This made them even more determined to annihilate the newcomers. Sniper mech pilots were like a nightmare, enemies that were well concealed and impossible to avoid.

30 thousand mechs advanced towards the Gu Family's fleet. They were the closest to the fleet, and the first to arrive.

Darkniss slowly flew out to the front of the fleet. Its massive hull raised more than a few jealous eyebrows. It would be so wonderful to have a huge starship like that. The 15-kilometer long starship made it look like a fortress in outer space, or a mobile high class headquarters.

Everyone's attention was on the starship Darkniss.

Under their curious attention, the seemingly harmless Darkniss finally bared its menacing teeth.

"Open weapons ports."

"Energy at max."

"Target locked."

...

The comms channel was flooded with chatter. The warship's crew members executed their duties methodically. The warship's

armaments were brought to life.

Darkniss opened up its weapons ports, revealing huge ship cannons for all eyes to see. The cannon barrels were thick and intimidating. The energy core radiated a faint blue light that illuminated the dark hull of the ship.

The viewers inhaled sharply. The comms channel on Csebesini's side went silent.

One, two, three, four ... 46! There were 46 ship cannons. It was a staggering number.

The warship was not done yet, however. 600 shooters were now in position, and the 600 gun ports all opened, pointing their laser guns at the mechs outside.

This was a day that many would never forget.

The passageways opened, and rows and rows of mechs came out.

This left the viewers shocked.

Harmony of the Winter Aria was one of the more fancy mechs that Ye Chong had used. It was also the Ji Family's best mech model. Since these mechs were built with large amounts of rare alloy metals, the mechs shone with a unique metal lustre that made them look even more solid and elegant.

Their laser guns were based on the work of the Research Consortium from Gray Valley. One could tell immediately that they were unusual weapons.

This world had gone mad!

Suddenly, there were so many identical advanced level mechs. All the mech pilots could tell that these were top quality mechs.

People inhaled sharply in the comms channel.

A single mech of this quality would not have warranted so much attention. However, the simultaneous display of over 4000 Harmony of the Winter Aria was an impressive sight.

The difference between having one advanced level mech and 4000 of them was more than about numbers.

As the broadcast went live, viewers were treated immediately with a view of the 4000 mechs. "The Gu Family of Tian Luo chose not to comply with the local authorities, and had responded provocatively. To ensure the safety of all residents, local authorities have -" The newscaster stopped short when she saw the image on the holographic screen.

She had just received orders from the higher-ups and could barely absorb the news when she saw this shocking image. Whatever she had planned to say was forgotten completely.

The viewers watching the holographic screen, however, were in an uproar.

"Oh my God! What's happening?"

"They're gorgeous! What mech is that, and where can I buy it? Do you think I can book one?"

"What a strong presence ... That's f*cking swell!"

...

Unlike the mech pilots at the scene, the public welcomed the image. The local authorities did not expect this, and could not respond in time. They had acted first and made Csebesini into the last haven in the world. People rushed towards the Galaxy for protection, encouraging acts of bribery and illegal agreements ... The local authorities turned corrupt very quickly. They were no longer who they used to be.

30 thousand mechs positioned themselves firmly in front of the warship Darkniss firmly.

These mechs were on a completely different level compared to the ones from Csebesini. The Galaxy had more soldiers, but their opponent had a warship! That was a weapon that could turn them to ashes. The commander of the Csebesini army was able to glean

some details and make certain conclusions. He could tell that the opponent was much more capable in battle. For example, over 4000 mechs were deployed into formation in under five minutes. His own army would need at least 15 minutes to achieve the same thing. This tiny detail told the difference in strength between both sides.

He was facing an elite army, what could he possibly do? He had strength in numbers, but the commander knew that the difference in strength between them could not be balanced with their numbers. Besides, there was that warship. The commander could only stare at it enviously.

Many of the viewers were gratified to see the local army being put in their place. After all, most of the people who escaped to Csebesini were taken advantage of. It was satisfying to see someone put up a fight to the local authorities.

Records would show that the official channel viewership at the time reached a record high of 42%, breaking the previous record of 11%. The newscaster never recovered from her shock to continue her script.

Everyone followed the event closely.

Ye Chong, however, decided to make his next move as he noticed a large army of mechs heading his way.

Chapter 601: General Xi Ding

On the holographic screen, one could see countless mechs heading their way towards the mysterious warship. The tens of thousands of mechs were accompanied by over a hundred warships. The Five Galaxies had always banned research on warships until the red-tailed beast invasion began.

These warships were clearly influenced by the Three Aristocratic Families from He Yue Galaxy, but it was a mixture of influences from the Three Families that failed to achieve their core qualities. These warships were like trash in Ye Chong's eyes. Ye Chong believed that these warships must be the work of the Three Aristocratic Families' employees sent to the Five Galaxies. Besides, the warships were modified from normal large starships, which had a very different structure compared to a proper warship.

Without further delay, Ye Chong ordered Appilok to fire.

The first weapons up were Darkniss's ship cannons. Ye Chong always believed in the importance of ship cannons, especially in a battle between warships. The ship cannons could determine their very survival. The few warship battles Ye Chong had seen left a deep impression in him. An individual's strength was almost negligible in a battle between warships.

All of the ship cannons on Darkniss were made from the extremely rare Belfang metal alloy. Belfang metal alloy was usually reserved for high precision mechanical parts. It was never used to build ship cannons, not even in He Yue Galaxy.

Five thick laser beams shot out from the ship cannons. People only saw a bright flash that momentarily blinded them.

The five warships were hit instantly. Their thick hulls did nothing to shield them from the laser beams. The ships exploded into pieces under the attack.

Boom! All five warships exploded simultaneously into five dazzling fireballs in space that engulfed the metal carcasses. The explosion sent out fragments of metals flying outwards at high velocities, which then hit the mechs surrounding them and sent those mechs crashing down. A few of the mechs exploded immediately in midair. Ye Chong knew exactly how to destroy a warship. Traditional ship cannons usually did damage by piercing the target's hull. Unless the cannonfire hit something vital like the engine or energy cell storage, the enemy ship would not be heavily damaged.

The ship cannons on Darkniss fired laser beams and spheric photon grenades. This highly unstable weapon would explode with the slightest amount of contact, and cause great damage to the enemy ship.

The devastating firepower from Darkniss shocked the viewers and combatants alike.

It felt like their hearts stopped beating for a short moment. They had expected conflict of some kind, but not for the warship to actually fire at them so ruthlessly.

Ye Chong's actions had surprised them so much that they were momentarily paralyzed.

The local authorities who were following the incident closely were also shocked. They looked at each other in fear, for they expected such an unyielding opponent. Nothing like this had happened ever since the invasion of the red-tailed beast.

If the other party had not presented themselves so professionally, they would have looked more like space pirates.

Suddenly, the comm device on their desk rang.

They jolted out of their surprise and activated the comm without thinking.

"You imbeciles! Who the f*ck ordered them to attack? Are you

blind? Do you not see how powerful the opponent is? Are you dragging me into your f*cking act of suicide?"

A man roared through the comm device loudly, threatening to bring the place down.

"General ... General ..." Someone in the room tried to explain. The man yelling at them was not someone they should mess with. He was the person with highest authority in Csebesini's military. Xi Ding Defense Line was his handiwork. It was because of him that Csebesini Galaxy became the last haven in the Five Galaxies. His reputation in Csebesini Galaxy was unrivalled.

"Don't 'General' me. Let me tell you ssholes, I've allowed you to make your little profits all this while, so who the fck caused this huge mess? Which f*cker ordered it?" General Xi Ding continued to blast at the people without reserve.

The meeting room was dead silent. General Xi Ding was a man with a temper. No one in their right mind would dare to speak against him when he was mad.

The General cut the line in rage. After that, his personality changed completely. All the rage vanished, replaced by a deep coldness. Deep wrinkles carved into his stone-like face. His hair was snow white, but his cheeks were a blushing red.

"Do we have a background for the warship?" The General asked as he looked at Darkniss on his holographic screen.

His assistant shook his head. "None. The fleet is the Gu Family of Tian Luo, but we have checked their records and found nothing about a warship like this."

"The Gu Family of Tian Luo?" The General chuckled coldly. "They're not capable enough to build this warship. They are a dying empire, a mere shadow to their past. Get Hua and his people in here."

The assistant quickly activated his comm device and spoke a few

words. After a moment, a few men entered the General Xi Ding's office. This was a group of roughly a dozen people of different build.

"Do you know this warship" General Xi Ding asked without preamble and pointed at Darkniss on the holographic screen.

The group directed their attention to the screen.

After a while, a pale young man spoke up, "General, that warship is probably not from the Five Galaxies. It seems to be influenced by the Xue Lai Clan, where I'm from, but the overall design is different."

Another thin man said, "Hua is mostly right about that. The warship is definitely not from the Five Galaxies, but there seems to be some characteristics of my clan, the Ye Family."

General Xi Ding looked towards a woman, who spoke respectfully, "I agree with them both. Regrettably, I see no signs of influence on this warship from my tribe."

These people were the highest level personnel sent by He Yue Galaxy to the Five Galaxies. The invasion of the red-tailed beasts affected both Black Cove and the Orbits. If even He Yue Galaxy was faced with the threat of these creatures, how could their outer branches hoped to survive unscathed? They escaped from their headquarters and finally reached Csebesini Galaxy. In the end, they were caught by General Xi Ding, who had kept an eye on them from the start, and chose to cooperate.

General Xi Ding considered their words for a moment. "So the warship is not from the Five Galaxies. If it came from your home galaxy, then how did it arrive in Csebesini Galaxy? Didn't you say that the Gateways were overrun by red-tailed beasts?"

The group looked shocked, but Hua finally spoke up for them. "We don't know how they arrived here too, but it's true that we lost the Gateways. Perhaps they managed to bring the Gateways

back under control?"

The group felt encouraged by this possibility. They were resident of He Yue Galaxy, and missed their home. They had chosen to cooperate with General Xi Ding so that they could live to return home one day. However, they had received no news from their main families back there so far.

"Do you think this warship is capable of taking back the Gateways?" General Xi Ding asked as he replayed Darkniss's ship cannon attack and the warning shots on Wei Zheng's squad on the holographic screen.

"Impossible!" Everyone in the group gasped in surprise. General Xi Ding was greatly surprised by their reaction. Could this amount of power be insufficient to bring the Gateways back under their control?

General Xi Ding had heard of the story about the "homeworld" for mech pilots. It was said that everyone there was strong, and that the best mech models were made there. He had no ulterior motives towards He Yue Galaxy. Any one of the organizations here could easily overpower his own. It was simply not his place to even consider the possibility.

The abilities of these people in his room further convinced him of his decision. These people were extraordinarily capable, but they were only considered average in that place called He Yue Galaxy. Besides, their technology far surpassed what was available in the Five Galaxies. When the invasion of the red-tailed beasts first started, Hua and the others had provided invaluable technical knowledge that ensured the survival of Csebesini Galaxy.

However, since the group had described how powerful their main families were, General Xi Ding had hoped that they might be able to annihilate the red-tailed beasts. He knew that Csebesini alone could not hope to win the war against those creatures.

As time passed, the red-tailed beasts grew stronger. Csebesini was

progressing, but the time needed to develop and incorporate the necessary technology to survive was too long. The red-tailed beasts were expanding too rapidly.

Csebesini Galaxy might not live to see the day these creatures were defeated. General Xi Ding was old, but he hoped to leave behind Csebesini Galaxy as a safe and peaceful place for the younger generation.

When General Xi Ding heard the group's reaction, he looked deeply disappointed. Hua quickly recovered from his surprise and explained, "General, I think you misunderstood. We're saying that isn't impossible for this warship to be so powerful. Even our main family's warships cannot achieve that amount of power."

General Xi Ding looked towards the other members of the group. They all nodded in agreement.

"Then, do you mean that they are capable of taking back the Gateways?" General Xi Ding asked carefully.

"Absolutely!" Hua replied with certainty. He looked up and said, "General, I'd like to speak to them."

The reinforcements sent to Wei Heng were ordered to stand down and wait for their next orders. Everyone in the reinforcement troop felt relieved. They saw the attack earlier, just like General Xi Ding. They were mightily intimidated, but they could not disobey orders from their superiors.

Ye Chong received a request from the party to negotiate a truce. This was a first for him. The other party had also ordered for their army to retreat 130 kilometers back as a sign of goodwill.

Having encountered this situation for the time, Ye Chong was unsure what to do next. Should he continue firing, or not?

He looked at Gu Qing, who smiled back in understanding. "Looks like their higher-ups have a more accurate assessment of their situation. They must be intimidated by your strength to have

asked for a truce. The one who gave the order should be the real mastermind behind Csebesini."

A truce was the most desirable outcome that Gu Qing hoped for. She knew that if Ye Chong were to attack without reserve, the 10 thousand soldiers around them would not survive the battle. Csebesini could not afford this loss, so a truce was the natural conclusion to this incident. The only thing that surprised her was how accurate the other party's leader was able to gauge the strength of their warship with just a few shots from their ship cannons. It was very fortunate for both sides. As the last haven in this world, Csebesini did not lack capable personalities.

Thus, members of public watched how the arrogant soldiers restrained themselves. Was this really Csebesini's army? People rubbed their eyes and watched in disbelief.

Regardless, the warship Darkniss left a very deep impression. No one would have imagined that the next time the warship appeared before them, it would bear news of victory and hope.

The results of the negotiation was not know to the public, but the warship quickly left and disappeared from sight. It had appeared mysteriously, and left in similar fashion. The Gu Family fleet was left behind, but the incident had won them celebrity status in Csebesini Galaxy. They became the only aristocratic family to enter Csebesini Galaxy without being torn apart, a feat envied by many.

Chapter 602: Saving Xue Lai Clan

'Sir, we are approaching the Gateway," Hua said respectfully to Ye Chong. In He Yue Galaxy, the strong earned respect from the people. Ye Chong's strength was enough to earn respect from them all. They also hoped that he would be bring them home with his warship.

Once outside Csebesini, they were constantly interrupted with red-tailed beasts. Hua and the others also felt shaken by what they saw.

Where did this warship's crew come from? Hua and his people always broke out in cold sweat whenever they saw them in action. Were these people still humans? They killed the red-tailed beasts like a hot knife through butter. Words can barely describe their strength. Even those crew members who looked so weak and fragile managed to surprise Xi Feng Tribe's Feng Yan.

She knew that mentalists of their level were considered geniuses in their Tribe, and yet there were hundreds of them on this warship. Since when had such masterful mentalists become so common? Besides, these people were so young ... How could this possibly be true?

As the warship Darkniss advanced, they encountered more and more red-tailed beasts. Hua and his people went from greatly surprised to being numbed by their battles. In fact, any casualties the combatants suffered would have surprised them even more.

The presence of Hua and his people did not come as a surprise to Ye Chong. As someone who had seen all the best fighters from the Three Aristocratic Families, these branch members could hardly surprise him.

The main reason Ye Chong allowed them to come along their journey was because they knew where the Gateway to He Yue Galaxy was. Based on what he knew, there were three Gateways

that led from the Five Galaxies to He Yue Galaxy, each controlled by one of the Three Aristocratic Families. Ye Chong had spent time in the Orbits and Black Coe before, but he did not know the way to these Gateways. Fortunately, he now had people from all the Three Aristocratic Families to lead the way.

Rui Bing wanted to visit her mother and Grandpa Qian, but she held back. Now was not the best time to visit them. Xi Ding might just take advantage of it.

In the end, Ye Chong chose the MPA to help him. They traveled using the Gateway under Xue Lai Clan's control. This was the closest Gateway to Csebesini.

"This is the Gateway to He Yue. We controlled this Gateway, but the red-tailed beasts were too strong. In the end, we had to retreat to Csebesini." Hua spoke with mixed emotions. He was secretly worried. He never doubted the Clan's power, but it had been a long time since the red-tailed beasts took over the Gateway, and there was no news from the Clan ever since. They did not send any reinforcements to the Gateway, which was a worrying sign.

He feared that the Clan was in danger as well.

Here at the Gateway, Ye Chong and his people were met with strong resistance. There were far more red-tailed beasts here than anywhere they had been. This suggested to the humans that the red-tailed beasts were intelligent, such that they knew to guard their important assets.

There were casualties daily, but only with minor injuries. So far, the battle still leaned towards Ye Chong. His mech pilots had experienced countless battles in a short period. They were now true war veterans, honed sharper and sharper by their battles.

The improvements in the shooters were particularly obvious. No shooter had ever fought so intensely and frequently. The fact was, battle experience was tremendously helpful for them to improve. This was especially true for shooters at Level 7 and 8. Ye Chong

could appreciate better now why Mei Wu chose to stay in Darkniss.

To conserve their overall strength, Ye Chong would sometimes join the battle with Celest. Whenever this happened, the students who were not assigned for combat would enjoy his performance, occasionally offering commentaries on the side.

Compared to the group battles by the other mech pilots, Ye Chong's solo fights were more interesting. His preferred style was close range combat, fought with a mixture of cold calculation and explosive power. The students were always engrossed in his fights. If the warship had viewership records, Ye Chong's fights would definitely hold the highest record.

On the other hand, disciples of the Ye Family could only watch with astonishment. The Ye Family, famed for close range combat, could not hope to compare with this average looking young man.

Finally, they made it through the Gateway!

Hua and his people were overwhelmed by emotions.

However, the deserted view before them caught them off guard. The base was an abandoned wreck. Buildings were damaged everywhere, and covered by a thick layer of dust that suggested long absence of its previous occupants.

"Impossible!" Hua gasped with a trembling voice. The view had left him shaken.

50 thousand soldiers were stationed at this base! The Clan placed great importance on this place - he knew that very well. Nevertheless, the base was now empty.

He knew that with only a small group of people guarding this narrow Gateway, the red-tailed beasts would no be able to pass through. He also knew that the elders in the Clan could see this too.

So why, why did the Clan abandon this place?

Perhaps the situation escalated far beyond his imagination. His chest tightened at the thought.

They were finally in He Yue Galaxy. Everyone, including Ye Chong, Rui Bing and Sang Kan, felt greatly relieved. They must now quickly make contact with the Sang Tribe.

Ye Chong did not notice Hua's emotional turmoil. He was focused entirely on reaching out to the Sang Tribe. It was a simple task - as long as they had access to the virtual world or a place with pulsed signals, they would be able to get in touch with the Sang Tribe. After all, they had the infinitely capable Maverick, Little Rock, on Yi Ju.

However, things were made difficult for them. All the infrastructure around them was thoroughly destroyed.

Darkniss headed towards Yi Ju. They were now crossing Xue Lai Clan's territory.

"Sir, we have a situation." Someone reported succinctly. After surviving so many battles, the crew members were no longer easily unnerved.

"Ah!" Hua gasped. His body was shaking.

In front of them was a beautiful light blue colored planet, but it was deep in war.

All around the planet, laser beams were fired here and there. Mech squads accompanied by their warships fired against the red-tailed beasts with great tenacity. The red-tailed beasts were fast, and the mech pilots could barely aim at their target. The creatures did not fight with any visible strategy, but they were gaining the upper hand. The battle was at its peak. Occasional laser beams shot on Darkniss's hull, igniting sparks.

Just a short distance away from the planet was a huge cloud of purple mist.

"Sir! Please, I beg you! Please save our Clan!" Hua suddenly

turned to Ye Chong and kneeled down heavily as he begged. Tears streamed from his eyes. He never imagined that his ride home would end with him seeing the planet like this.

The other members of the Xue Lai Clan quickly went down on their knees as well and asked Ye Chong for help.

On the holographic screen, laser beams intertwined while mechs and red-tailed beasts pursued each other madly. For a moment, Ye Chong was lost in thought.

Appilok looked towards Ye Chong with a tilt in his head. He waited for Ye Chong's signal.

Ye Chong quickly recovered himself. It had only been a few seconds. Suddenly, one of the mechs on the screen caught his attention.

"Siva!" Ye Chong gasped.

Hua jolted, and looked up hopefully. "Sir, do you know Master Siva?"

Siva dodged left and right, avoiding all the attacks from the red-tailed beasts. However, the strength from a single mech was limited, and not enough to turn the situation around. When Ye Chong saw Siva, he could not help but remembered about the young boy. Rui Bing looked towards him, and Ye Chong saw her sharing his thoughts.

Did his mother belong to this Tribe? Ye Chong felt a mixture of emotions rising in him. A strange bitterness silently crept inside his heart.

Soon, Ye Chong composed himself and studied the battle on the holographic screen with a calm eye. He made his decision quickly and nodded at Appilok. "Prepare for battle!"

Appilok was expecting it. In fact, before Ye Chong gave his order, all the combatants were already in position. Since battles became more frequent out here, they had chosen to eat and rest near their

stations.

Hua and his people were overjoyed that Ye Chong agreed to readily. They always thought of Ye Chong was a cold man.

However, Ye Chong's next words chilled their burning enthusiasm. "Our target is the purple mist. Full speed ahead!"

Ye Chong knew the red-tailed beasts like no one else did. In some ways, he was more of an expert than Fei Si, an expert on the red-tailed beasts.

The flesh nest was the core of the red-tailed beasts. Only by destroying the flesh nest could they get rid of the red-tailed beasts thoroughly. The flesh nest was crucial to the growing population of red-tailed beasts and their evolution.

It was a drastic measure, but also a very risky one.

Ye Chong knew that once he started attacking the flesh nest, the red-tailed beasts would rush towards it. If they did not destroy the flesh net completely before the creatures arrived, they would never have a second chance. They must leave the purple mist before the red-tailed beasts arrive so that his mech pilots could be put to use.

With the colloid fungus substance spread on the warship's hull, Darkniss flew unnoticed towards the purple mist.

Everyone felt nervous. Besides Ye Chong, no one else knew what was in the purple mist.

The ship cannons were charging now, but the real weapon Ye Chong relied on was the 600 shooters on the ship.

Once they entered the purple mist, all holographic systems would be down. When that happened, they could only rely on the shooters, who had parapsychic abilities.

The purple mist had no effect on them.

Chapter 603: Heaven and Hell

It was not the first time they entered purple gas cloud zone, yet Ye Chong still was affected by the intense atmosphere. It was rare to see him this tense. This was in contrast with the calm crew members, who would probably never understand what encounters their captain had on his first visit here. This was the place where Ye Chong met a 6-toed red-tailed beast and obviously it turned out to be a close battle that haunted him as if yesterday.

The purple cloud this time was a lot larger than the one on Planet Yi Ju before. And Ye Chong was very aware of how it went directly proportional to the size of the red-tailed beasts clan.

The war also raged on at the galaxy between planets. Be it the red-tailed beast or the Xue Lai clan, they were both having a hard time in the war. The Xue Lai clan had deployed their best soldiers armed with the classic beam firearms. It might be a classic model yet remained as lethal to the red-tailed beasts. It was only natural to Ye Chong as the Xue Lai clan had the most technological talents among all the 3 aristocratic families. I mean, even the consortium could produce an impeccable weapon like the G-Z.

However, the foes were not too weak either. So it remained as a difficult fight ahead for the Xue Lai clan.

Ye Chong's soulless eyes fixed upon the lively war-field, like a killer he was.

He was looking for a target.

He had just found one.

Darkniss then launched itself into the purple cloud.

Back at the main control room, a shooter was assigned to lead the way. The ship was dead silent, as the crew members kept their mouth shut and let the professional do the job.

"Target: Radius Vector at 25 degrees. FIRE!"

"32 degrees, NOW!"

The beams struck at the joints of the nest like lightning.

A large explosion occurred and the purple cloud nest had turned chaotic. Certainly it was the work of the highly compressive grenades. Not even the hardened joints of the nest could withstand the explosion.

The damage the grenades had caused was beyond Ye Chong's imagination. He watched the large area of the nest blowing up as a single grenade fell like a shooting star.

Darkniss eventually passed the purple cloud zone and hit the interior of the nest. "Photon mode!" That was when Appilok noticed the effectiveness of these grenades on the tendrils.

The tendrils were turned into splashes of disgusting fluids. No sound was heard yet the explosions were convincingly epic. Fluids were discharged from the tumors of the tendrils and flooded the place.

The capability of the grenades was a joyful sight to the crew members. They had been long terrified by the horrendous-looking tumors which hung like a resting monstrosity. Ye Chong had to admit that there were more tumors compared to his adventure on Planet Yi Ju.

The tumors were the breeding chamber of the red-tailed beasts after all. There were at least 100,000 of them.

In the midst of explosion, Ye Chong was at first relieved, till he saw something ahead.

There were suddenly a pack of red-tailed beasts sprinting towards Darkniss, about a thousand of them. The grenades rained upon the red-tailed beasts, sending them backwards, yet not even a scratch could be seen on them, while they seemed to have been enraged.

Their previous victorious experience had them convinced that

nothing was undefeatable as long as they launched their piercing tails together. They strongly believed that this giant piece of scrap would once again, like the other scraps they had destroyed before, be pierced into ashes.

They were given the light treatment again, as they turned blind for a moment. They were unperturbed however, as they had experienced similar occurrences before and they were unharmed in the end.

They evaded the attacks as usual and they were planning to make their attack.

SPRINT!

Wait...uhh...

Something felt strange on the neck...

Uhh...how...why is it getting darker...

I can't...feel my toes...My tail was...hitting something?

...(What actually happened?)...

Brahmara, also known as Siva, danced with its blade on the war-field, even though its grand debut had yet caused to turn the tables on the situation.

"Chief, we are not in a good situation now." Reported an elderly.

A middle-aged woman nodded. She could see the situation as clear as the elderly. She was the chief whom the elderly was reporting to after all. Nonetheless, she could not think of a solid plan, not just yet. The war with the red-tailed beasts had lasted much longer than she had imagined. The situation of her clan had only worsened each day. Their territory had shrunk and the war with the red-tailed beasts had only grown larger.

This was the only planet left for them. It was such irony that an animal was able to corner them.

The Xue Lai clan, unlike the theoretical outcome due to their

technological advancement, was actually the worst among the all 3 aristocrats.

Still, it was this stress of being cornered that had initiated their potential.

It was a retreating fight at first, as the Xue Lai clan army retreated from the vigorous attacks of the red-tailed beasts. They might be weak but they were sure tenacious, much more tenacious than the red-tailed beasts had expected. The retreating wave soon stood still and braced the attack well.

The chief continued watching the situation.

She had been a chief for over 20 years. Her days as a chief passed restlessly. She was ever-cautious, knowing her responsibilities. If she was given the choice, she would not have sat on this bed of rose. Unfortunately her sister disappeared one day out of sudden, so, being the sole heir she was, she had to hit the throne.

It was god-blessed for she never made a wrong decision as a chief. The people liked her all these years. It stirred her a little as she realized her caution for the entire term.

"Chief, please look. Something had happened!" Notified Lady Xue, one of the servants.

Lady Xue might be known as her maidservant, but she was treated as her own daughter. Lady Xue was intelligent and probably the most talented person among the younger generation. Though not as talented as Yu Shan, her son. However, Yu Shan was accursed by his top-notch intelligence as his growth had ceased as a child. Despite being 24 years old, he still had a body and mind of a 7 to 8 years old child.

It was as if a sign of envy from god, to show all humans were equal. Yu Shan was gifted with his amazing intelligence in mechanics yet was probably "handicapped" since he was born. Nonetheless this did not stop him from his great contribution to

the clan.

One would never know, the top player of the Xue Lai clan, the creator of Brahmara turned out to be a boy from Neverland.

Ever since Shang had disappeared with the chief's sister, the Xue Lai clan had lost its greatest player, but well, fate was capricious, as if god would like to watch dramas, almost simultaneously, the top pilots from the other families had disappeared too. Ye Luo from the Ye family vanished while the top pilot of Xi Feng had been murdered in the free space zone.

Yu Shan had watched the growth of Brahmara ever since it was created. They were like brothers and the chief, being the mother, was proud of them. Yu Shan was talented but that did not assure him a good chief. Well, at least he had Brahmara, so he was rather invincible.

Only if Shang was there, it would feel more like a family.

The chief missed both Shang and her sister. Shang should be still in this world, perhaps, even though she was sure that her sister was no longer the owner. The new owner was some boy named Ye Chong. All these while she had been trying to figure out the relationship between Ye Chong and her sister. She would want to lift the cover and check Ye Chong out but Ye Chong turned out to be a rather ferocious and hostile person. It was supposed to be a reunion yet it ended with bad blood as both of them were quite hot-tempered at first too.

The puzzling part was the fact Yu Shan seemed to be have grown fond of Ye Chong, while Ye Chong took good care of him. Yu Shan was a nitpicker and he technically had no friends in the clan. It was almost surprising when she heard him confessing his fond over Ye Chong. Ye Chong had also asked Yu Shan about Shang before. Well, that justified one thing - he owned Shang.

Brahmara was a production based off of Shang's design by Yu Shan, while it involved more of the newer technologies, even

though the materials involved remained inferior.

Brahmara was probably as strong as Shang in the past, though the chief was never competent as her sister. The chief's sister was a firm figure, a supportive leader and she missed her.

"Chief!"

And she put her sentiments away, shifting her focus back onto the battlefield.

"What's the issue now?" She said grimly. Being a chief for so long, she had mastered the skill of hiding her emotions.

"The red-tailed beasts seemed to be retreating!" Reported Lady Xue, in a bit of confusion.

"Retreating?" The chief was bewildered as well. The red-tailed beasts were indeed leaving the place... hurriedly... but why? What had triggered their fear so much?

She knew the beasts well after battling them for so long. The red-tailed beasts might have launched their attacks frantically but they fought on orderly rapports.

They might be locked in a stalemate but the red-tailed beasts were obviously winning. There was no point for the red-tailed beasts to retreat.

So why, what made them?

Could there be a plot twist?

Clusters of red-tailed beasts scurried from the scene as they ran towards the purple cloud zone in fright.

The chief rolled her eyes, "Send orders to Brahmara — Hold the beasts back, no matter what! They can't leave just yet!" The chief could foresee their plan, and she would certainly not allow it to happen. She might not be unsure of the situation inside the purple cloud nest, but she would not allow them to get what they want!

Well, that was what she could do anyway. They must do

something!

The pilots sent the order promptly, as they were also aware of the sudden change among the red-tailed beasts. They would not confront the red-tailed beasts, instead they would confuse them with strange attacks.

The pilots launched their mechs upon the red-tailed beasts, chasing after them, shooting beams from all sorts of direction to knock the beasts off the track. The beasts were struggling to run away.

This was where the superiority of ranged attacks of the Xue Lai clan shone.

The beasts were killed one by one by the crimson beams. It was not because of the impeccable accuracy, it was because the beasts were struggling to protect their nest by taking the beams themselves.

It took about 30 minutes for them to arrive at the nest.

That was probably the countdown to the fall of their nest ironically.

Why they were trying so hard to protect the nest?

Had they lost their mind?

The entire Xue Lai clan was not sure of what had happened to the red-tailed beasts, but one thing for sure, it was a golden opportunity to fight back.

It was no longer a battlefield for the clan. It was instead a training ground for them to practice shooting, an easy training too, as the red-tailed beasts were too frantic to perform any proper evasion. They were not even trying.

It was probably the most thrilling battle ever. No more strategy, no more tricks, no more counter attack, no more piercing red tails, no more evasion, it was just shooting.

It was a release of fury accumulated over the past few weeks of warring the red-tailed beasts for the Xue Lai clan.

The wave of red-tailed beasts was shrinking drastically while the living ones still ran towards their nest in panic.

It was a dense wave at first, once countless. But in less than 10 minutes, about only a thousand remained.

That was when something actually happened at the nest.

Chapter 604: A Warning Shot

For long, the purple cloud zone had been a landmark of space, haunting the intergalactic travelers like a lump of aggressive horror as if there was something that sucked the entire space in.

It almost felt like an absolute truth of eternity till the Xue Lai clan witnessed the changes occurred.

The purple clouds were boiling, vigorously rolling. With a diameter of more than a few thousands kilometers, the sight was shocking.

People of the Xue Lai clan were stunned, "W-what's going on?" Whispered the chief as she watched the sight in disbelief. Her men were the same, bewildered.

The pilots screamed, overjoyed a moment later, though they had no idea what had actually happened. It seemed like a great chance to fight back and they decided to launch themselves upon the red-tailed beasts that headed to rescue their compatriots.

Ye Chong, in the meantime, had discovered a simple way to clear the crowd.

High compression grenade.

The classic which had been long forgotten by history, had resuscitated in Ye Chong's hands as it would devastate the entire structure of purple cloud area. One single explosion could clear a large area of the bush. This was a much better alternative than beam firearms which hardly penetrated the tendrils.

The shaking explosion wrecked the whole area, as fluids sprayed the space rocks, the shreds of the unborn red-tailed beasts filled the space. Even the most wicked monster would be the most fragile at their infant stage.

Ye Chong looked at the screen again after the grenades were hurled.

A 6-toed red-tailed beast was making the evasion clumsily in the midst of explosion, its body was tainted by the dried fluid from its prematurely dead offspring while a piece of meat from an unknown part of its compatriot also dangled on one of its shoulders.

Sha Ya was the first person who discovered the escaped beast. Whispers passed quickly among her mates and all the crosshairs went upon the running beast immediately.

The target was clearly of a high rank. It had six toes after all! That was one exciting dummy for shooters to practice aiming! The shooters traced the beast quickly with their weapon. The anticipation brewed on as they wanted to make that outstanding headshot to impress the others, till Ye Chong, in a cold tone, "All fire at once."

Sha Ya knew the captain well. The captain was never a person who liked to have things done rather than being entertained. The orders were passed through whispers again.

Reformation occurred as the shooters spread into 2 batches of 300 each, where one would clear the incoming pack of red-tailed beasts while the other, under Sha Ya's command, would make massive fires at the 6-toed elite.

The waves of parapsychic attack ambushed the elite like a roaring shock-wave.

Ye Chong could see the raging fear inside the frozen pupils of the red-tailed beast. It was biting its teeth as it stumbled upon the attack.

As the leader had said — kill it right off and no more messing around, Sha Yan executed the order flawlessly.

The fired beams rained upon the beast like a giant bar of glowing fence that sealed off the beast entirely. There was no gap to escape. The red-tailed beast would soon be killed.

And then they missed.

Strangely, they did. Against the law of physics, they did.

The beast unleashed its potential as its body distorted itself to fit into the gap of fence. It was close but the red-tailed beast managed to survive with only a few beams that brushed against its body, of which one charred a 5 centimeter deep wound on its shoulder.

The shooters were of course stupefied. The strategy they just employed was one specialized for handling a dexterous target like red-tailed beasts and adjustments had been made from time to time to improvise, yet this red-tailed beast hacked its way through their light fence attack.

The red-tailed beast then further twisted its body.

"It's running away!" Whispered one shooter sharply. Their experience told them that a wounded beast would make its runaway frantically. They were quite right, a hint of fear could be discerned in the bloodshot eyes of the red-tailed beast.

Right when the light fence passed through the surviving beast, an additional set of beams were fired, like the three musketeers dived through the gaps of the fence, penetrating the body of the beast.

The center of the forehead was bleeding, the throat was bleeding, the heart blew up. The distortion remained on the anatomy yet the soul was lost in the fierce eyes of the red-tailed beast, glowing dimmer each second.

It was Sha Ya who launched the arrows. She predicted the escape and added the shots.

The one plot twist after another had excited the Xue Lais as they first tasted victory of overcoming the beasts. The army of red-tailed beasts had further shrunk into a measly hundred.

The anticipation grew stronger!

The purple cloud had begun fading away as the supporting

tendrils broke down. The shooters managed to knock out most of the red-tailed beasts yet a few tens of them were approaching their destination.

The beams could not reach them!

And Sha Ya was puzzled thinking of a way to hold the beasts.

That was when a bursting flock of laser beams smashed the remaining beasts.

The field was silent.

What... just happened? The purple cloud area should have been the nest of the beasts.

"HOLY!" One person was screaming at the communication channel, "What the heck is that! Guys, switch to photon mode!"

Then they finally saw it, a giant warship.

No one would actually craft a gigantic warship. A simple spaceship could have been more superior because of its speed and dexterity. Only lunatics would make a warship this giant. Sha Ya believed this was by far the largest warship she had seen in her entire life. The most ridiculous part was how they were literally blind to this whale-sized monster the whole time.

The body of the ship attracted attentions. A Zika-ranked ship body that fired laser beams that landed the fatal spots of the red-tailed beasts accurately. The warship traveled slowly in grace, like a king on his debut to the peasants at the street. For some reason, the running mechs ceased moving and went into a hostile position.

A few mechs were then zooming towards the mech out of nerve-wrecking curiosity.

It was only natural for humans to react with aggression towards the unknown.

...(On the ship)...

Everyone knew whose ship that was.

Appilok was on it, giving a new order, with an indifference one had seen countless times on their supreme leader. "Perform warning shot."

And the next barrage of laser beams crossed the void.

The bewildered Xue Lai clan was terrified.

"Enemies?!" The old chief was feeling unease, her army was already drained and no way they could take another wave of attack.

The beams were reaching the mechs.

It was too fast! The plot twist was too fast! The Xue Lai clan never saw it coming.

It was the same flock of beams that broke the red-tailed beasts completely in one go. No doubt, they would be doomed!

The beams landed, yet fortunately they only hit the ray guns the mechs were holding.

The ray guns exploded.

A warning shot in fact it was.

Xue Lai clan, once excited by their victory, was again chilled to their bones.

Chapter 605: Return of Legend I

The modern hologram detection system clearly could not capture the appearance of this giant in space. It was shocking to the crew when they saw the warship through photon detection mode. A few crew members started estimating the distance between both parties. That was quite far for beams to even hit the mechs, let alone to hit them with such accuracy. All 10 shots made contact at the joints between the ray gun and the mech itself! None of them missed.

Sniper? Sniper mech pilot!

That was the first phrase that popped up in people's mind.

That did not look good, thought the chief of the Xue Lai clan as colors were drained from her face, "Order! Do not attack until further notice." She could tell the missing hostility of the foes. Well, if the foes were hostile, the entire clan would have been toasted instead.

It was a warning shot, obviously.

No one was foolish enough to move a muscle even without her order, especially when the immense fatigue that raided them after the biggest threat in their career had been eliminated. The accuracy of the beams convinced them to have their hands off the interface too.

So, Ye Chong finally met the chief of the Xue Lai clan. It was a private meeting only involving both of them, as demanded by Ye Chong.

She looked at Ye Chong at the strangest curiosity. The young man appeared to be fairly ordinary for the leader of a gigantic warship. He did not seem trained judging by his slender physique, but it was that indifferent charisma of him that convinced her his identity.

Ye Chong scanned the chief in a fickle disbelief, for he could not imagine such a feeble woman to be the chief.

The chief never knew the name of this indifferent young man before her, though she had given countless missions of capturing the person named Ye Chong.

She never thought of it.

It was not far-fetched for that to happen to be honest. Over the years Ye Chong had changed, a part of his graceless nonchalance had been coated with an unknown charisma. That was why the chief did not recognize him, "I am Ye Chong." till he introduced himself.

The chief had lost the colors on her face again. She knew that name, she knew that name too well. She had been given lots of reports regarding this man disgraced by her people before the red-tailed beast incident.

She frowned as corners of her eyes wrinkled in dismay, Ye Chong could not help but sigh at her reaction of suppressed fear.

Perhaps... perhaps... she could be related to his mother.

Sadness filled him as he thought so, though his expression remained unchanged.

The chief was expecting to be killed for what she had done before, she closed her eyes and prayed for a peaceful death, "Hey." And Ye Chong gave her a microchip, "Load this."

Her eyes went wide as saucers when she opened her eyes. That was a pretty ancient microchip, justified by the model number printed on it - about one decade ago.

But why? Of all times? An outdated microchip?

In slight confusion she inserted the chip to the processor.

The Xue Lai people were getting restless on their ship. Their chief had been somehow "led" to the suspicious-looking warship

that almost killed their people just now. It was not a good feeling as they felt they had just fed the chief to a hungry tiger.

Back on Darkniss, Appilok glanced at Sang Kan, "Kan Kan, how do you think?" Said he as he looked at the Xue Lai clan, "Our leader asked us to wait."

"Yeah, what else can we do?" Sneered Sang Kan, "Like what could they do anyway? Remember what they did to our teacher? They are fortunate to have yet encountered us back in the He Yue galaxy."

Appilok went completely silent as he knew he had just opened a wrong conversation.

"Shhh, careful with your words." Scowled Rui Bing, "You don't know the entire truth, Sang Kan."

Rui Bing was right, she had seen the visual, she had checked out the logs. She knew the actual connection between Ye Chong and the Xue Lai clan, and certainly it did not feel good to hear something offensive from an outsider who knew nothing like Sang Kan. She believed she would not be able to face this meeting if she was the one instead.

Sang Kan pulled a funny face at Appilok and went quiet.

A moment lapsed and Ye Chong returned, with a loss of vitality that never had occurred to him in front of the people before him. "We are staying here for the next few days, keep your guards up." He gave a quick order and stormed into his room. Rui Bing sniffed and followed.

Appilok and Sang Kan were confused, while the shooter team led by Sha Ya were bloodthirsty enough to fire those Xue Lai clan members into beehives any second.

"What the hell is going on?" Sha Ya could not help but curse.

Meanwhile, the Xue Lai clan were joyful to hear the news, as the chief announced Ye Chong's identity.

"It's the descendant of Ms. Yu Yu! That explains A LOT!" Ye Chong's chivalry had been justified as the senior members hurrahed.

The Xue Lai clan was feeling pumped as they knew Ye Chong being the offspring of two greatest legends from the different aristocrats.

Ye Chong ignored the joyous calls of Xue Lai however. In the next few days he never left Darkniss. Possibly because of the fact that his mother belonged to the clan, he did not perform any kind of execution on them, despite all the things they had done before. But that did not mean he would like them, since he felt no emotional connection to any of them other than the little boy. Same goes with his feeling at Ye family, he probably would only talk to Ye Luo.

He was too tired to entertain the family "reunion" as he lingered on Darkniss.

Sang Pu was working at the deck, till the communicator woke him up from his mundane routine, but who would that be at this timing?

The number appeared to be strange to him. Confusing enough.

"Hello?"

...(Meanwhile)...

Sang Tie had been officially assigned as the commander of the Collision army, and he was conducting training with the new trainees now. These were the members newly transferred from the Sang Family village.

"STAY UP! WORK HARD! THE SANG FAMILY HAS NO TRASH!"

The family today was grand, "...all thanks to our teacher... he would certainly be pleased if he sees how great our family has become today..." There was sentiments in his eyes. It had been depressing news when Ye Chong disappeared along with Rui Bing.

The communicator rang at his waist, it was Sang Pu.

"What is this fella calling at this time?" He took the phone.

"Uh huh... Really?? I don't know what to say... this is..." A joyful news it was, that Sang Tie's hands were shaking, "Alright! I'll be there soon!"

The new trainees were bewildered at their commander's expression. It was never seen before. "Everyone gather up. Call the rest of the trainees. All be here in 30 seconds or I'll break your legs for sure!" Shrieked Sang Pu.

Half a minute later, the Collision army rolled to the center...

...(At another place)...

Sang Ling led the sixth army which guarded the front line, which was the boundary of planet Yi Ju. The Collision army had been the main defense force of the Sang tribe and they had impressed the world after that fight against the red-tailed beasts. Many different forces had formed alliance with them that they managed to expand their territory to all the surrounding planets. They were great but they were low in number, so they forced six different armies that camped on different planets to combine. The sixth army was ranked the last but they offered the greatest offense, though most people remembered the sixth army merely because how most of the members were lassies.

"Meeting now." Sang Ling stormed into the meeting room, her subordinates were astonished by her panicked reaction.

The intense ambiance was shattered by her speech after a moment of adjustment, "I had just received an order from Mr. Sang Pu." Both Sang Pu and Sang Ling might have been brother and sister but Sang Ling would formally address her brother at the workplace. Sang Ling seemed to have matured a lot after her marriage with Sang Fan.

"So regarding this..."

The people anticipated.

Chapter 606: Return of Legend II

"We are going to pick up someone this time."

Her subordinates were intrigued - picking up someone? Who? With an army of such size? Wait!

A few of the subordinates seemed to have realized the only person who was capable to grab such attention from the leader, as excitement tinted their expressions.

"The first, third and fifth army would be joining us too."

Four out of the six armies scattered across the surrounding space zone of Planet Yi Ju had been called up for the big mission this time. This was probably the largest operation in the entire history of the Collision army, the soldiers were astonished by the details, wondering what man of what galaxy could waver the armies so easily.

"Also..." Sang Ling, as if the news was not shocking enough, decided to give a few more juicy details, "I have just received updates, that, the Collision armies had departed, while there were also armies sent by the 12 other smaller tribes, following our lead." The so-called smaller tribes were ethics who had close connection to the Sangs, the Jin Gui tribe for example.

"Oh..." The subordinates were quiet, as it was quite the overwhelming information for them.

"All departments get ready. Departing in 4 hours. Destination : Planet Xue Hui." Sang Ling looked at her subordinates, "Dismiss."

...(Meanwhile, at the laboratory on Planet Yi Ju)...

The Core Mathematics Laboratory was the most advanced mathematical laboratory on Planet Yi Ju, as well as the known facility in He Yue galaxy, led by certainly none other than the boy genius, Little Rock with his group of professional researches.

"Ahem..." Little Rock initiated, as he cleared his throat, "Everyone, put down your work in hand. We have a situation here." Both Little Rock and Zhu Ling were already happily married for two years by then. Although Little Rock remained as a shrinking violet, he had turned more vocal throughout these years.

"We need to take over all the cameras hovering between Planet Yi Ju and Planet Xue Hui. I also need a few men to keep an eye on any suspicious activity on the Virtual World. All these is to make sure the transmission is smooth."

...(Meanwhile at Qiu Man)...

The great lady was negotiating with a major cooperation which was having different opinions in their upcoming deal. "No, I'm not giving in for this, and you know that." Qiu Man's tone was strong as her personality, as well as her gaze, till her secretary stormed into her office and whispered a few words into her ears.

Her expression changed, "What?" Gasped she, "Sorry, no more deal today. Some other time maybe." And she left the office.

Planet Yi Ju had become the most developed planet in the entire He Yue galaxy by then. It was also the safest planet due to the powerful army led by the Sangs which annihilated the whole wave of red-tailed beasts nearby.

The planet was peaceful for months, till today, people were gasping out of astonishment as they spotted countless gigantic mech units zooming by the sky. It looked as if a prelude to a war.

"Wowie, what's going on today?"

"Such army, Is there something happening?"

"I h-h-hope not." The person, as if terrified by the wartime before, replied hesitantly, "B-b-but well! Even if there is something going on, our Collision army is unbeatable!" His statement went proudly.

"True that."

"Well, check out the news, and we'll know."

Having that said, this day was bound to be the historical day in the galaxy.

The massive army movement had alerted the residences in the galaxy, that the Sangs had to pass out announcement promptly to clarify that the movement was merely an escort trip, not one that marched to a war.

But wait, they are going to Xue Hui?

Isn't that the home of Xue Lai clan? When did the Sangs have something with Xue Lai clan?

On record the Sangs had once coldly declined all requests from the aristocrats and this totally contradicted their current movement.

So why? Who or what had caused the army to make such a drastic move?

This was the first time the Sangs left the Planet Yi Ju area, with an official document announcing the purpose of their trip.

The mysterious figure was sure great.

The tribes around fancied the authority the Sangs built up over these years and they had provided ample supplies for their journey. This was probably the only golden opportunity they could get to butter up this strong army to ally with them since the Sangs were the extremely low-profiled group among the others.

Different tribes contributed their own elites to join the fleet led by the Sangs and the fleet grew over time. The residents were anticipating the mystery to be revealed, regarding the master behind the entire scene. That was when a microchip was sent to the Ye family under the escort of the elite of Xue Lai clan, the very elite himself, Brahmara.

The microchip stirred up a storm at the Ye family who was

already troubled by the hurricane of red-tailed beasts shower.

The Ye family immediately sent off a fleet to Planet Xue Hui, by where they met the representatives from the Xue Lai clan as they zoomed their way to Xi Feng tribe.

The development caught the attention of people again, as theories brewed, regarding this figure that had the ability to gather the forces around under his lead.

The aristocrats had joined each other, fighting against the red-tailed beasts.

The red-tailed beasts were terrifyingly formidable, that the aristocrats had to retreat on almost every occasion. If it was not the Sangs, the people would not have survived.

The Sangs were as if the silver lining in the sky, though victory remained far, far away from them.

The unity of the aristocrats, would that signify a real peace? A true victory?

Zuo Mi was a sailor who worked really hard at the ship, and somehow, as if fueled by something, there was not the slightest fatigue discernible on his face, as he walked in and out of the corridor constantly to get his tasks done.

Countless fleets arrived by to load themselves with the necessities, Zuo Mi was assigned to guide the ships to the port. The number of mechs and giant warships had kept him pumped somehow, "Wow, we actually still have so many allies around us!"

It was the confidence that fueled him, he realized, confidence towards the future of humanity.

The mass media was promoting the movement, of the growing army all traveling towards the same destination - Planet Xue Hui.

Zuo Mi was exhausted by the work as he fell asleep after his meal, only to be waken up by the noises, "The Xi Feng is here!" One of his

colleagues shouted.

He got up and ran towards the window to witness the arrival of this great ally which signified the completion of the intergalactic alliance of aristocrats and it had certainly attracted participation of more forces around.

Chapter 607: Finale. New life and where things ended.

The brewing movement outside did not affect the crew in Darkniss the slightest. To Appilok and his subordinates, the He Yue galaxy was somewhere beyond their reach and they certainly did not bother to follow the news. As long as they got their tasks done assigned by their leader, they thought. Team Ye Chong resumed their routine, they were undisturbed as usual, unlike the Xue Lai clan.

The clan had guests.

TOO. MANY. GUESTS.

They had to supply their workforce with untrained youngsters by shoving them to the front desk straight away to greet each massive group of guests, like the newly surfaced Collision army which arrived at Planet Xue Hui first, as they were rather eager to reunite with their master, Ye Chong.

"Sir!!" That was what Sang Tie screamed upon seeing Ye Chong again. He was very, very excited, that he could not contain that emotion in him as he spoke, "H-H-How have you been?"

The rest of the family was stunned, a majority of them was the former army trained by the master himself back at the Sang family village, in which a few of them even had hand-in-hand Collision mech tutorial with the master. The respect or more precisely the worship had grown into a profound passion in them, towards Ye Chong.

Ye Chong stared at Sang Tie and rested silently, sentiments sprouted in him, as he almost could not recognize Sang Tie at first glance. He looked a bit more different than Ye Chong remembered. Things had changed apparently, not only Mu, Shang and Rui Bing had changed, the Sangs too had grown. That was joyful news

indeed.

Little Ye Chong knew, again, what he brought to the world hundreds of chapters ago, the grand gathering he caused was a major historical event in the chronicles of the galaxy. The adjectives towards the event might be all "great", "grand", "amazing", "never-before-seen", but only the people who were fortunate enough to be participating the event itself would know how exciting it was.

"Mhm..." A moment of silence and Ye Chong asked, "Have you all contacted Mu and Shang?" The juniors were confused, but the higher ranked Sangs knew what the master was talking about.

Sang Tie shook, "Nope, I imagined them with you."

Ye Chong was quiet again, his mind ran fast.

If Mu and Shang did not join the Sangs, they must be still at the Gray Valley.

Oh Mu and Shang, how are both of you? I miss those days...

Thought Ye Chong.

...(Meanwhile)...

Reporters from all corners of the galaxy had arrived on Planet Xue Hui, only to see the one person who was able to wield the few aristocratic forces across the universe so easily. But they had no luck, the hunt might be just a wild goose chase as the mysterious figure never really showed up in person. The reporters, having their hope sank, were feeling agitated by the lack of development of newsworthy stories. They knew where the figure was, yet they could hardly do a thing. There was only one last place, of the entire galaxy, where the reporters had never been to - the same mysterious gigantic warship that came out of the nowhere, the Darkniss. Juicy information was perceived from the Xue Lai clan on different interrogations with them, claiming how destructive Darkniss was, as well as how the mysterious figure led the entire

crew of sniping Shooters.

The reporters waited on as they observed the formation of an alliance between the aristocrats under the lead of Sangs.

...(Two weeks later)...

The He Yue galaxy alliance had been officially established, which only familiar names were involved — the Sangs (the majority of the alliance, about 20%), the aristocrats (15% each) and the leaders of other minor groups. The authority of the Sangs was once again perceivable in the eyes of the people, they were the newly emerged force that had overtaken the three aristocrats.

The reporters were opening their eyes wide as they skimmed through the list. No. No...? There was not a single name that seemed to have association with the mysterious figure, and Darkniss had never attended the alliance meeting and formation ceremony - the ship did not even have its gate opened once.

This alliance was much stronger than any of its former, as it took up 3/4 of the whole military force in the He Yue galaxy and certainly they would need a commander befitting to its greatness - Sang Pu. He was called and rushed to Planet Yi Ju.

People were very intrigued of this new force as high hopes were given upon them to clear out the pack of red-tailed beasts destroying the galaxy. The residents were very aware of the fact that this very army shall determine the fate of the He Yue galaxy.

That was when Darkniss stealthily departed, with 10 Sangs' warships under his lead, on which 400 pilots boarded each.

...(Meanwhile, at Team Sang Pu)...

"We finally got it through." Sang Kan breathed in relief as he glanced at Sang Fan, who joined Sang Pu from their home planet to command the army of 4000 Collisions. Sang Pu felt more secure if they were able to allocate more men in the rescue mission of Lord Mu and Shang, but their teacher, Ye Chong, disapproved for the

teacher felt the number was more than enough.

In this vast galaxy, probably only Mu and Shang could provide Ye Chong such security. Mu and Shang was so capable that even Ye Chong felt more confident in their works than himself. Mu and Shang might be facing the fearsome red-tailed beasts, but he believed that the artificial intelligence and indulgence could clear the wave effortlessly as long as they had their turn to attack.

From the Xue Lai clan, Ye Chong had already obtained the firsthand information regarding Mu and Shang's whereabouts in Gray Valley. His machine buddies were much more stronger than their former self 20 years ago, not even the new ace of the Xue Lai clan, Brahmara, could be competent in terms of performance. However, it might still be a different story if it was a one-on-one. Technically, Mu and Shang was a far better all-rounder than Brahmara.

It was a smooth sail for the following days, as the alliance, under Sang Pu's lead, managed to clear out several nests of red-tailed beasts.

All thanks to their great teacher, Ye Chong who shared his experience with Sang Pu while pointing out the exact ways to get rid of these pests.

And the Xue Lai clan finally had the time to catch their breath, as they began producing their new weapon, the Red Vapour III. The clan was still an aristocrat for a reason. They only needed a short period to recover and grow stronger.

The fragile nest made out of tendrils had become the fatal weakness of the red-tailed beasts. Humans could disrupt the reproduction of these beasts immediately by destroying the nests, though it still was a trouble to face the beasts themselves.

The beasts were running to all corners, while the alliance were unable to stop these running monstrosities. The people were pleased however. It was a form of victory after all. It would be only

a matter of time till the red-tailed beasts had their justice served.

Nevertheless, the clusters of red-tailed beasts that escaped to all corners of the galaxy were rather impossible to be completely eliminated. So one had to admit that the galaxy would no longer be as peaceful as it once was.

Meanwhile, Ye Chong did not bother much about the galactic war happening out there. He had his own war to fight. Darkniss, under the escort of his fellow 4000 Collisions, was traveling safely from one stop to another.

The pathway to Gray Valley was not as dangerous as he imagined, the waves of red-tailed beast were far less frequent.

But how?

Right in the midst of confusion when Ye Chong activated the portal to Gray Valley, one of Sangs' fleet stayed behind and joined Xue Lai's army at the entrance to the free space zone.

This separate team had a different mission, which was, to retrieve a sunken vessel under the navigation of Old Jalopy and Fei Si.

Why the vessel?

Well, something was in there.

Coraplatinum, the essential material to repair Mu and Shang.

So the one fleet parted ways with Darkniss at the portal to Gray Valley and certainly the two ships had to test their transmission.

"Is it working? Was there any signal?" Asked Ye Chong to Sang Fan.

The little warship of the Sangs might not be as grand as Darkniss but it had a far superior communication system created by the Core Mathematics laboratory, one led by Little Rock and his team of researchers. The system was very powerful in capturing communicative signals and it clearly had convinced people the

power of that one boy genius.

...(Meanwhile somewhere at Gray Valley)...

Yang Ming was heading to Planet Vincent. He was no longer that apprentice under Harrell the Great thanks to his continuous effort in mastering the mechanics. By then he had become the foreman leading his own group of mechanics to Planet Vincent where the front line was pleading backup repairmen in fixing their broken armory.

Even though Sir Jay (Ye Chong)'s disappearance had once caused a bit of trouble in his fleet, he and his men managed to build a new miracle under the lead of Lord Mu and Shang.

They had been strengthening their fortress, utilizing the ample resources found on Planet Spectre where they founded their main base too - all thanks to the impeccable plan by Lord Mu and Shang.

And it was that one accident occurred during their fight with red-tailed beasts which exposed the beasts' vulnerability - the nest.

Because of that, they managed to safeguard their territory by wiping out all nests in Gray Valley, as about 30% of the red-tailed beast population remained. The red-tailed beasts were less threatening without their nest. They were nerfed, and had become the training monsters for pilots to farm their contribution points.

The name of Lord Mu and Shang the Great was heard again throughout Gray Valley.

Mu and Shang had seized control of the majority of areas in Gray Valley and in no time they would taste the real victory, the end of the war once they opened up the pathway to the He Yue galaxy.

The catch was, for some reason, despite being one step before victory, Lord Mu and Shang insisted on not leaving Planet Spectre, and the men knew the lord was waiting for Sir Jay. And this capricious lord had been very, very mysterious to even his own men, that only Sir Xi Qing and Sir Shu had met the lord in person,

yet they were forced an oath of silence whenever the lord was mentioned.

When would the waiting days end?

The men were anticipating the finale.

"Sir! We had detected signals!" Reported one member to Yang Ming.

"What kind?" Frowned he as he muttered, "Impossible... we have controlled everything here, how can there be new signals?"

"I don't know sir..." Responded the crew member.

"Hmmm..." He then made his decision, "Report to the base on Planet Vincent. Try performing a transmission with the signal after that. Stay on guard." He would not want to risk as he was leading not a warship but an ordinary spaceship, filled with ordinary repairmen which were under guards of a small group of pilots.

...(Back to Darkniss)...

"Sir!" Ye Chong was alerted by the visual, he could not believe he actually encountered an ordinary spaceship in Gray Valley. A few more glances and he noticed the name of the ship painted at the body - FLEET JAY: G-044.

A spaceship that started with the code "G", it had to be a spaceship for the maintenance team, but the name "Jay"? Ye Chong finally remembered something as he had an awkward smile. A hint of joy filled his head.

Seems like Mu/Shang had quite some fun here, eh?

The transmission prompted!

BEEP BEEP

"Jajajajaja! If it wasn't our boy!" The familiar beeping tone prompted.

...(Back to Team Sang Pu)...

The army was winning! The wave of pilots gradually engulfed the purple cloud zone. It was a strategic move as they tried luring the red-tailed beasts to leave their nest, only to demolish their nest using highly compressive grenades after the beasts had reached a certain distance.

The red-tailed beasts panicked but the army did not fight them directly yet. The army decided to drag the run to wear the beasts out so they would have an easy kill in the end.

Of course, it worked like a charm.

It was an idea by our protagonist, Ye Chong, after all.

He Yue Calendar Year 2455 April 14th - Lord Mu/Shang officially resigned from his position in Sir Jay's fleet. Both Xi Qing and Shu took over the position. All system remained unchanged.

He Yue Calendar Year 2455 June - the very last nest of red-tailed beasts, destroyed.

He Yue Calendar Year 2456 - the alliance of the 3 aristocrats and Sang family joined the Xi Ding defense line on Planet Csebesini in the Five Galaxies to launch full attack at the homeless red-tailed beasts.

He Yue Calendar Year 2457 - the situation in Five Galaxies grew stable, making the finale of the apocalypse.

Throughout the years, the human population on both He Yue and Five Galaxies slumped. He Yue galaxy suffered 70% loss in the figure while Gray Valley lost about 50%.

The Five Galaxies had the worst, where only 20% of the population remained, while having a number of planets in barren.

It was as if a wipe of civilization.

Humanity only regained bit of the former peace before 3 years later. Under the motivating policy by the governments, people

started reliving the barren planets. Nonetheless, there were still clusters of red-tailed beasts out there, so they were obliged to migrate in groups, guarded.

That was where pilots shone again.

It was another golden age of pilots.

The apocalypse had ended for so long yet Planet Blue Ocean was deserted, in an ironic forgotten situation being a developed trading planet before. Its resources had been long drained so it lacked the basic attraction to the people in the outer space. Those who returned to the planet were actually because of either the nostalgia or the sense of responsibility. No one would consider visiting planet otherwise.

Well, fortunately, as society regained its vitality, Planet Blue Ocean retrieved its spotlight due to its strategic location. The population improved, so was the infrastructure. A mini trading center was even established at a few spots across the planet.

...(And at that one shop by the street)...

The children were running happily, chasing the torn puppets which looked like the red-tailed beasts with their mech action figures. Columns of steam could be discerned from one side. There was an aroma wafting in the air, of delicious beef. The sound of dough slapping the board could be heard.

An indifferent young man, in the robe white as the uniform of his beloved, was rolling the dough. A gorgeous girl, in her white garb, waving her long, dark hair occasionally as sweated slightly, was slicing the braised beef pulled from the bowl. An old man was resting at his bamboo chair, breathing serenity.

"Ye... Umm..." The thin slice of beef fell into the steaming bowl of pork stock, "I still want a daughter..." Mumbled Rui Bing, biting her lips.

"OKAY!" Said Ye Chong, spirited, as he slammed the dough to the

board, "I'll work on that tonight!"

BEEP BEEP At the lawn, a handicapped mech was grabbing the vacuum cleaner with his only arm, "Rating - Cleanliness: 7, Humidity: 3, Dust Amount: 2. Plan B: Executing."

At the attic, a row of cradles stood peacefully... "WAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!" till a piercing cry of child broke the silence. "WAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH! BOOOHOOO! BOOOHOOOO!" As if a prompt by the conductor of an orchestra, the rest of the children joined the music. Sha Ya, formerly in her meditation, opened her eyes wide and sent the children into mid-air. The children were floating, as if gravity was lost, as they began giggling, grabbing the air.

They gradually swam towards Sha Ya, as they, in great curiosity, made strange cries.

And being the fairy godmother of these children, Sha Ya knew the children wanted their entertainment again.

"Oh well, it's time for the magician to perform again! Hiya!!" She waved, in excitement of a party clown, as she whispered, "Sigh, I should have joined Weidong and the other mercenaries..." That was probably the 1520th time where Sha Ya made the same remark.

And upon hearing the conversation happening at the front kitchen, another remark which occurred also the 1520th time was heard again, "They sure are the couple in combat. Fight great in field, fight great in bed... We are going to run a dojo soon at this rate."

"GAHH! GAH GAH GOO GOO! TCH!" The 4 little devils were brandishing their meaty arms, furrowing.

"Sigh... alright alright..." Sha Ya turned to them and waved her hands, "Here we go again."

The fairy godmother started her magic show again.

And they lived happily ever after.

...

Fin.

Credits:

Translators:

Jack - the sarcastic bad boy Mole - the sincere kind gal Editors:

Sporesan - the funky editor Tscvanessa - the quiet editor (We also have a shadow editor earlier and we missed her, she did such a great job) THANK YOU FOR READING!

Translator's live reaction to the ending: What???? That's it?

What happened to red-tailed beasts? They did not clear them entirely?

What happened to the whor-I mean, the other waifus? What happened to Xue Ling? Rui Bing's sister? I wanted some group "activities".

Basically the author just spent 3 to 5 paragraphs describing, again, how amazing Ye Chong was as he brought historical movement and the whole world was showering him attention, and they formed alliance, and a timeline skip, and the end?????

My whole life has been a lie. I don't want to live on this planet anymore.

Author's Note:

Author's note regarding the ending and reader's feedback:

Hah~ I saw how all my beloved readers not accepting this ending, well, that's quite a conundrum isn't it?

As much as you want to say it sounds rushed, I actually had plotted this ending way back, like ... last year (Fun fact: this book took the author about 2 years to hit this ending, so he probably meant he thought of this ending somewhere back on Year 1). It was not a rushed ending that came out of nowhere.

Back when I was also a reader, reading other amazing stories like you, I always hoped that the epic tale would never ever end, but when those authors put up a rather unsurprising ending, I felt quite disappointed actually.

The story started off tempestuous and certainly at some point, the storm would subside and all it's gonna end rather plainly. It's a pretty natural way to write a story, in my opinion. This is the kind of ending I imagined way back.

Well, a few readers commented that I still got a lot of holes uncovered. Regarding that, I believe that it is impossible to clarify everything, to cover every ground in a book. So, it's fine, as long as the major issues get covered.

Moreover, I felt a lot with this ending, as it provides readers the space for imagination. The 8-toed red-tailed beast leader has not been caught, while clusters of red-tailed beasts lingered on every other corner in the galaxy. The peace had not really arrived, a war could still happen. Don't you think it's interesting to end the story at a point where there's still a lot of potential everywhere?

At least, the story could still continue, in its own way, in the heart of the readers.

Phew, and I'm finally done. Such a chore for me, but well, haha,

such a chore for everybody. A writing that lasted for about 2 years, it would be a big lie if I say I still have that strength (Translators: US TOO).

Well, it'll be a period to catch a breath. I do feel much more relieved, though I'll be going into another war soon.

(The author then promotes his next novel, wow, this is literally heart-dead writing)

Translator's Note II:

The author did a bit poorly for the ending as he technically briefed through several rather important scenes where I felt he could have put in lots of feelings in them to stir the emotions of the readers.

Those scenes could be made more impulsive.

So yeah, again, I juiced them up. I also added the author's note, I hope that those could lighten up your sentiments leaving this novel LOL. I had extended this chapter as much as I could.

We are also here to promote our next novel. If you have liked my odd satire on the author's writing and liked mole's decent translation, we would like to invite you to the our upcoming project.

Stay tuned!

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